THE BIBLE IN THE SYRIAC TRADITION

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Introductory note: This Course is arranged in eight sections covering the following topics:

Dear SCC Participant,

Šlom !

Welcome to participate in the SEERI Correspondence Course (SCC) which now offers a series of courses in Syriac Christian heritage and in the Syriac language. The Syriac Christian tradition is an important stream of Christian tradition distinct from the Western (Latin) and the Eastern Byzantine traditions. Among the Oriental Christian Churches those within the Syriac liturgical tradition, may be said to hold pride of place, since they are representative of, and to some degree, direct heirs to the Semitic world out of which Christianity sprang. The Semitic world was the cradle of Christianity. The people among whom it was born and first spread and developed set the mark of their own genius on its first forms of expression and naturally enough they have continued to be the most fit to think and live it in accordance with what it was from the beginning. The West has lost at least something of the more humanly and religiously ample character of early Christian revelation and an expression of its own original flavour which have been better conserved in the Semitic Christian East. The Bible itself is built on the Semitic tradition. Therefore an understanding of the Bible in the Syriac tradition is conductive to a better understanding of the original Christian revelation and Christian life. So we begin our Correspondence Course with a course on 'The Bible in the Syriac Tradition'. We believe that we cannot get a more suitable person to guide this course than the Oxford Professor of Semitic studies Dr. Sebastian P. Brock.

About the Author:

Sebastian P. Brock was born in London, U. K. in 1938. After his education in Cambridge and Oxford, he taught in the Department of Theology at the University of Birmingam and later in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cam-

bridge. Since 1974 he is professor at the Orieintal Institute of the University of Oxford. He has written extensively in learned journals on Syriac subjects and has published several articles and books. Among his works are:

— The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of St. Ephrem (1975, 1983).

— The Syriac Version of the Pseudo-Nonnos Mythological Scholia (Cambridge, 1976)

— The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition (Syrian Churches Series 9) (Poona 1979).

— The Luminous Eye (Rome 1985).

— The Syrian Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life (Cistersian Studies Series 101) Michigan 1987.

— The Teaching of the Syrian Fathers on Prayer (Syriac Text) (Bar Hebraeus Verlag, Holland 1987).

We hope that the SCC will lead you to the thrill of a great tradition of learning and spirituality.

Rev. Dr. GEEVARGHESE PANICKER
Director of SCC

SECTION I

1. How does the Bible reach us?

When we read the Bible today we normally read it in a modern printed edition and in a modern translation, whether it be in English, or Malayalam, or some other language. It is worth reflecting how these printed editions and translations came into being: what lies behind them, and how do they influence our understanding of what the 'Bible' contains and says?

Printed Bibles only go back to the sixteenth century. Previous to that Bibles had to be copied by hand, a laborious and slow process. The invention of printing had two important consequences for the Bible: in the first place, printing has made it possible for Bibles to be circulated much more widely and much more cheaply; and secondly, printing has helped to standardize the arrangement and contents of the Bible. We shall be looking at some of the consequences of this revolutionary invention below.

The manuscript Bible was rarely a complete Bible, for normally a biblical manuscript would only contain part of the Bible, such as the Gospels, or may be the whole New Testament. Each book would be devided into chapters, but several different systems of chapter divisions were current; thus, for example, the chapter division in Syriac and in Greek manuscripts differs from that in our printed Bibles. The chapter division familiar to us today in printed Bibles in fact belongs to the Latin translation by Jerome, known as the Vulgate; though the system was only devised in the Middle Ages, it was adopted in the printed text of the Bible in all languages in the sixteenth century, and so this particular system has now become universal. Manuscript Bibles in languages other than Hebrew also lacked any form of verse division: our present verse divisions in the Old Testament derive from the Hebrew Bible, and these were introduced into printed Bibles in all languages in the course of the sixteenth century. In the New Testament the verse divisions and numberings were first introduced in some of the first printed editions of the Greek text.

Manuscript Bibles in all languages except Hebrew were in book, or 'codex', form. For purposes of study the Jews would also write out the Hebrew Bible in codex form, but for liturgical use in Synagogue they always wrote out the text on scrolls (a practice which still exists). The scroll is in fact a much older invention than the codex. The codex only came to be widely used for literary texts in the early centuries of the Christian era, and it seems that Christians helped popularize the new format by first employing it for writing out biblical texts in Greek. The codex has many advantages over the scroll: in particular, the codex is much easier to use, and it can hold very much more text than a scroll.

Before the invention of the codex people had invariably used the scroll; thus, for example, the biblical manuscripts in Hebrew found at Qumran, on the Dead Sea, are all in scroll form (they date from about the second century B C to the first century A D). This means that the original authors of the various biblical books will have first written their books down on scrolls, rather than in book form, in codices. This almost certainly applies to the authors of the New Testament books as well as to those of the Old Testament.

The biblical manuscripts from Qumran, which come from a collection of texts often known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls", are the oldest surviving biblical manuscripts in Hebrew. Most of them are very fragmentary, and the earliest complete biblical manuscripts in Hebrew date from very much later, from the tenth century.

The books of the Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) were translated by Jews into Greek in the third and second centuries B C. This collection of translations came to be known as the Septuagint (Seventy) since an early tradition claimed that the Pentateuch had been translated into Greek at Alexandria by seventy translators from Palestine. The Greek-speaking part of the early Church took over this translation from the Jews, and in due course the Jews themselves abandoned it. A few small fragments of the Septuagint from the second and first centuries B C survive, but the earliest complete manuscripts are Christian ones of the fourth and fifth centuries and later.

Jews also translated the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, and these translations are known today as the Targums. Fragments of a pre-Christian Targum to Job have been found at Qumran, but the other Targums which survive probably originated in the early centuries of the Christian era, and the manuscripts containing them are almost all late medieval (twelfth to sixteenth century). Jews may also have translated some books of the Bible into an Aramaic dialect resembling Syriac (Syriac originated as the local Aramaic dialect of Edessa), and these were then taken over by the early Syriac-speaking Christian community to form the beginnings of the Peshitta Old Testament. The earliest complete manuscript of the Syriac Old Testament belongs to the sixth or seventh century.

Modern translations of the Bible are made from particular editions of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament. Surviving manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible have a remarkably uniform text, and so there is very little difference between one edition of the Hebrew Bible and another; it is likely the that precise form of the Hebrew text as we know it goes back to an authoritative edition produced about the end of the first century A D. Before that date there was evidently a certain amount of variation between different manuscripts.

In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) and the Greek New Testament may differ from one another considerably in details of wording, and so modern editors have used the earliest available manuscripts in order to provide their readers with a text as close as possible to the text written down by the original authors. This is by no means a simple task, and as a result different editions of the Greek New Testament will often have slightly different texts. In most cases these modern editions will differ in many small ways from sixteenth-century editions, whose editors mostly relied on rather late manuscripts. These differences are reflected in the various English translations: one can easily discover this by comparing a passage in the King James version, made in the seventeenth century, with any twentieth century English translation.

As we shall see, manuscripts of the standard Syriac Bible are remarkably uniform in character; in this respect they are comparable to Hebrew biblical manuscripts, and unlike Greek ones.

2. Biblical translation, some general problems

Fashions in biblical transaltion change over the course of time. Twentieth-century biblical translators approach their task very differently from the way in which the ancient translators went about their work. The aims and the self-understanding of ancient and of modern biblical translators were radically different. One can generalize and say that the ancient translator was oriented towards the original text, while the modern translator is oriented towards the reader. As a result of this different orientation the ancient translator translates with great deference towards the original text, striving to render it 'word for word', even if this may sometimes result in 'nonsense translations'; in contrast, the modern translator seeks to render the text intelligible to his reader and as a consequence he translates 'sense for sense', rather than 'word for word'; and he will avoid at all costs any nonsense translations. Ancient translations will thus tend to be more literal, and modern ones more free and interpretative. Within each type of translation, the more literal and the more free, there is in fact the possibility of great variety, as we shall see later on, in connection with the Syriac Bible.

Virtually all early biblical translations, into whatever language, are basically text-oriented, rather than reader-oriented. When did biblical translation change its practice and become reader-oriented? Right up to the end of the European Middle Ages word for word translation remained the norm for biblical translation, and it was only in the sixteenth century that practice changed. There are good reasons for linking this important shift with the invention of printing.

Before the invention of printing the main context in which the Bible was read was during church services, but after the invention of printing it became much more available to be read by individuals at home. Since many passages in the Bible are extremely obscure, this new situation gave rise to problems for the Church, all the more so since it coincided in time with the movement for reform in Europe. As long as the reading of the Bible was largely confined to the context of the liturgy, the Church was able to exercise its authority in matters of scriptural interpretation since biblical readings could be accompanied by homiletic expla-

nation. Once however the Bible had become readily available outside the liturgy there was no longer any means of control over how the Bible was to be interpreted, and in the course of the Reformation period in Europe all sorts of extravagant interpretation began to circulate. There were two main reactions to this abuse of the Bible at the time: the Roman Catholic Church tried to minimize the use of the Bible outside the context of church services, thus reducing the danger of misguided interpretation of the Bible by individuals. The Reformation Churches, on the other hand, dealt with the problem in quite a different way, by adopting a completely new attitude towards biblical translation itself: from the time of St. Jerome (late fourth century) to the end of the European Middle Ages (fifteenth century) the ideal aimed at by all biblical translators had been (as we have seen) a 'word for word', rather than 'sense for sense', rendering; this meant that, if the original text was obscure, the translator was content to pass the obscurity on to the reader, leaving the matter of exposition to the preacher. At the Reformation the role of translator came to be joined, to some extent, to that of the preacher or expositor, and so the entire aim of the biblical translation changed: no longer did the biblical translator defer to the original text, rendering it 'word for word'; instead, he saw his task as conveying to the reader his own understanding of what the biblical text meant. Accordingly, in the process of translating the Bible into the various European spoken languages of the time, the Reformers felt the need to be much more interpretative in their work of translation than earlier translators had been.

Virtually all modern biblical translations have inherited this changed attitude towards the task of the biblical translator, although modern translations are interpretative in very different ways from sixteenth-century European translations.

St. Jerome, who produced the revised Latin translation known as the Vulgate, was the first person to formulate the view that it was appropriate to translate the sacred text of the Bible 'word for word', rather than 'sense for sense'. We can, however, see from the history of the early biblical translations that this ideal had already been put into practice long before his time. In the case of most ancient translations of the Bible we can observe the same course of events: the earliest translations into a

particular language are rather inconsistent in character, since the translators lacked experience and precedent; before long, however, people noticed that there were differences between the original and the translation, and so they started to revise the original translation, bringing it closer into agreement with the original. This process of revision might be repeated, or go on over a period of time. In every case we end up with an extremely literal rendering of the original text. This movement towards a more and more literal style of translation can be particularly well documented from the history of both the Greek and the Syriac Bible, for in both cases we have somewhat inconsistent styles of translation at the earliest stages, followed by a series of revisions aimed to bring the translations ever closer into line with the underlying text of the original. The end results of this process of revision were highly sophisticated mirror translations.

But even the translator who sets out to provide such a mirror rendering cannot avoid being interpretative in places: quite frequently (and especially in the Hebrew Old Testament) the original text is ambiguous or obscure, and so the translator is forced to make a choice between two or more possibilities. At creation (Gen. 1:2) is it 'the Spirit of God' or a 'mighty wind' over the primordial deep? Both ancient and modern translators are divided over this and many other such ambiguities. Indeed, sometimes the very choice of a literal rendering might be considered interpretative: a good example is provided by the first word of the angel Gabriel's greeting to Mary in Luke 1:28: in English the familiar rendering of the Greek "chaire" is 'hail (Mary)'. The standard Syriac biblical text of the New Testament has "shlam lek" 'Greetings to you', the equivalent Syriac form of the Greek greeting (similarly, the New English Bible has 'Greetings'). The very literal seventh-century Syriac version known as the Harclean prefers to give instead the etymological equivalent to the Greek, namely the imperative 'rejoice'. Should the translator pay more attention to the form ('rejoice') or to the content ('greetings')? Ancient translators like the author of the Harclean New Testament thought that the form was more important, while modern translators consider that the content has the greater importance.

We have seen how the invention of printing altered people's attitudes towards the nature of biblical translation. Printing has

also had an important effect on the contents of the Bible; this is because printing makes possible the wide criculation of a single edition or translation, resulting in a kind of standardization that was not possible before the invention of printing. We have already seen one such censequence, namely the introduction of a standardized system of chapter and verse numbering. Other kinds of standardization introduced by printing can be seen by comparing the contents and order of books in different modern translations. Bibles produced for the Catholic church will differ from those produced for the various Reformed Churches: the former will contain the deutero-canonical books, while the latter will normally not; and the order of certain old Testament books will be different. Orthodox Bibles will again differ from both Catholic and Reformed Bibles. Here we can see that the invention of printing has standardized the differences between the various Church traditions.

We need to consider one more problem which needs to be faced by the modern biblical translation, since this also has a bearing on our attitude towards the Syriac Bible. What biblical text should the translator treat as authoritative and translate from? At first sight this seems an easy question to answer: the Hebrew text for the Old Testament and the Greek text for the New Testament. As we shall see, however, this is by no means the only answer. Certainly most modern translations set out to translate from the Hebrew and the Greek, but even here problems arise: the edition of the Hebrew Bible used is in fact a medieval Jewish one where the originally consonantal text has been provided with vowels; it is true that the consonantal text goes back more or less in its present form to the late first century AD, but in many cases (especially in poetic books) this consonantal text could be read with different vowels, providing a somewhat different meaning. Modern translators normally follow the medieval Jewish tradition of understanding the text, but it would also be possible to take the consonantal text as the starting point, without necessarily following the particular interpretation of reading the vowels which the medieval tradition provides. It would also theoretically be possible to take as a starting point an earlier form of the Hebrew text, such as that presupposed by the Septuagint (which in some books must

have differed considerably from the Hebrew text we know). Again, someone might reasonably expect a translator to try to go back to the exact from of the Hebrew text as first written down by the individual authors of the old Testament books. This, however, is an impossible task, for we have no means of getting behind the variety of different forms of the Hebrew text which we now know to have been circulating in the first few centuries BC.

In response to this state of affairs, we need to make use of the distinction between 'literary authenticity' and scriptural authenticity'. Literary authenticity refers to the exact wording of the original author (which, in the case of the Hebrew Old Testament is unattainable), whereas scriptural authenticity refers to a form of the biblical text which has been held by the religious community as authoritative. This distinction has important consequences: literary authenticity can only apply to a single form of text, but scriptural authenticity can apply simultaneously to several different forms of text. Thus, as far as the Hebrew bible is concerned, it could be said that scriptural authenticity applies, not only to the medieval Jewish edition of the Hebrew, but also to its consonantal basis which goes back to the late first century, and to the Hebrew text used by the Jewish translators of the Old Testament into Greek. But scriptural authenticity is by no means confined to the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament: it applies just as much to the ancient versions, the Greek Septuagint and the Syriac Peshitta, since both these translations have been regarded as authoritative biblical texts by the communities using them.

Once we realize that scriptural authenticity is not necessarily confined to the original biblical languages, it then becomes clear that modern biblical translations should not exclusively be made from Hebrew and Greek: for the Greek and Russian Orthodox Church it would be just as desirable (especially for liturgical use) to use translations from the Septuagint; likewise, in the case of the Churches of Syriac liturgical tradition, it will be important to make available translations from the Syriac Peshitta. These translations would primarily be for use in the liturgy (as we shall see, the Syriac liturgical tradition is rooted in the Syriac Bible); but for other purposes too, they could be profitably used alongside the existing translations from Hebrew and Greek, thus providing an additional source for spiritual insight.

3. A Bird's Eye View of the Syriac Bible

For all the Churches of Syriac tradition the authoritative form of the Bible is the Syriac translation known as the Peshitta. The Peshitta Old Testament was translated directly from the original Hebrew text, and the Peshitta New Testament directly from the original Greek; the so-called deutero-canonical books or 'Apocrypha' were all translated from Greek, with the exception of Bar Sira (Ecclesiasticus), which was translated from Hebrew.

The date of the Peshitta Old Testament is uncertain, and in any case not all books will have been translated at once, or by the same persons. Some books may have been inherited by the young Syriac Church from translations made by Jewish communities in the region of Edessa and Nisibis. It seems likely that most books of the Peshitta Old Testament were translated during the period from the late first century A D to the early third century A D.

The Peshitta New Testament is in fact a revision of an earlier translation, known as the 'Old Syriac'. The revision may have been made over a period of time, but was completed sometime in the early fifth century. The circulation of this revision proved extremely effective, for the Peshitta rapidly replaced the Old Syriac and had become the authoritative Syriac text of the New Testament before the schism between the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East, brought about by the christological controversies of the mid fifth century.

A large number of manuscripts of the Peshitta survive, and the oldest of these date from the fifth and sixth centuries. Since an entire Bible written out by hand was very bulky and awkward to manage, most manuscripts only contain small groups of books at a time and complete Bibles are very rare.

The rarity of complete Bibles before the coming of the printed book has had an important consequence: the precise contents and order of books in the Syriac Bible has never become entirely fixed (even in modern printed editions the order in which the biblical books are printed may differ considerably from one edition to another). As far as contents are concerned, the most important feature of the Syriac Bible is the absence from the original Peshitta translation of the New Testament of some of the Catholic Epistles (2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude) and the Revelation of St. John.

(Apocalypse); in most printed editions of the Syriac New Testament, however, the Syriac text of these books has been supplied from later Syriac translations.

Although the Peshitta is the standard biblical text, it is not the only Syriac translation of the Bible.

For the Old Testament, there is a translation made from the Greek Septuagint. This version is known in Syriac as 'the Seventy' ("Shab'in"), but is called the 'Syro-hexapla' by modern scholars; it was made by the Syrian Orthodox scholar Paul of Tella over the years 614—616 in Alexandria (Egypt). Although the translation was probably never intented for liturgical use, its text is nevertheless sometimes to be found in Syrian Orthodox lectionaries. The Syro-hexapla survives in a number of manuscripts, but unfortunately we do not have the complete text (parts of the Pentateuch and Historical Books are missing).

The Syrian Orthodox scholar Jacob of Edessa (died 708) made a revised Syriac translation of certain books of the Old Testament, basing his work on both the Greek Septuagint and the Peshitta. Parts of his work survives in a small number of very old manuscripts.

A few other relics of translations of individual Old Testament books from Greek into Syriac also survive; these may have been commissioned by the Syrian Orthodox theologian Philoxenus of Mabbug (died 523).

For the New Testament we know of a number of other Syriac versions, besides the Peshitta:

The oldest Syriac translation of the Gospels was almost certainly in the form of a harmony of the four Gospels, known as the Diatessaron, a Greek work meaning 'through four', that is, a single Gospel text derived from the four Gospels. Only very small fragments of this survive, and much uncertainty surrounds its authorship and origin. The Diatessaron is usually thought to have been composed by Tatian, a native of the Mesopotamia who studied in Rome under Justin Martyr in the middle of the second century A D, and then returned to his homeland. It is not known

for certain whether he composed his Gospel harmony in Greek or in Syriac. In the early Syriac Church, before the birth of the Peshitta New Testament, the Diatessaron was evidently considered as an authoritative Gospel text, for St. Ephrem wrote a commentary on it in the fourth century. Once the Peshitta New Testament had come into existence (early in the fifth century) the Diatessaron fell out of favour, and as a result no complete manuscripts of it survive.

Next in time after the Diatessaron com the translation known as the 'Old Syriac', of which only the Four Gospels survive (preserved in two very early manuscripts). The date when this translation was made remains uncertain: some scholars suggest the late second or early third century, while others prefer the early fourth century. In any case the Old Syriac seems to be later than the Diatessaron, and in many places it has been influenced by the Diatessaron. It is likely that the Old Syriac originally extended to the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, but no manuscripts containing the Old Syriac version of these books survives.

We have already seen that the Peshitta New Testament is in fact not a completely new translation from Greek, but a revision of the Old Syriac, correcting it against the Greek text. Over the poriod from the fifth to the seventh century Greek language and culture became more and more prestigious in the eyes of Syriac biblical scholars, especially in the Syrian Orthodox Church; as a result, two further revisions of the Syriac New Testament were made, trying to bring it closer into line with the Greek original.

We know that the chorepiscopus Polycarp completed a revision of the Peshitta New Testament in 508. This work had been commissioned by the Syrian Orthodox theologian Philoxenus, metropolitan of mabbug, and so is normally called the 'Philoxenian' New Testament. The Philoxenian version is unfortunately lost: it was evidently never circulated widely and no manuscripts of it survive; it is possible, however, that the extant sixth-century translations of the Minor Catholic Epistles and Revelation may belong to this revision, in which case we do have the Philoxenian version for a few books, at least.

This lost Philoxenian revision served as the basis for yet a further revision of the Syriac New Testament, completed in 616 in Alexandria by the Syrian Orthodox scholar Thomas of Harkel. This revision, known as the 'Harclean', provides a remarkable mirror translation, reflecting every detail of the Greek original. The Harclean was widely circulated in Syrian Orthodox circles and was often used for Gospel lectionaries. The Harclean New Testament survives complete, and includes the Minor Catholic Epistles and Revelation.

In tabular form we have:

OLD TESTAMENT	Hebrew	→ Peshitta (c. 2nd cent. AD?)
	Greek (Septuagint)	→ Syro-hexapla (616)
NEW TESTAMENT	Greek	→ Diatessaron (2nd cent.AD) (Gospel Harmony)
		→ Old Syriac (c. 3rd cent.)
		→ Peshitta (c. 400)
		→ Philoxenian (508)
		→ Harklean (616).



SECTION II

THE SYRIAC BIBLE – A CLOSER LOOK

1. Old Testament

(1) TRANSLATED FROM HEBREW: "PESHITTA"

The name 'Peshitta' means 'straightforward, simple'; it was given to the standard Syriac version of the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) in order to distinguish them from the seventh-century translations, the Syro-hexapla and the Harclean. The name is first encountered in a ninth-century writer; earlier authors had simply referred to the Peshitta as 'the Syriac'.

The origins of the Peshitta translation are very obscure and Syriac authors had no clear memory of how and when the work was carried out (a few implausible guesses were nevertheless circulated). A close study of the translation itself can throw a little light: from such a study we can deduce the following:

—the Peshitta Old Testament is not the work of a single translator, but must have been carried out by many different translators, perhaps working over a considerable period of time.

— the translators all worked basically from the Hebrew text, and this Hebrew text was basically the same as the consonantal Hebrew text of our printed Hebrew Bibles. Since we know that this consonantal text became the authoritative Hebrew text some time in the late first century AD, it is likely that the translators were working after it had been widely propagated.

– in some books the translators seem to have consulted or made use of other translations: thus at various places in the Pentateuch (Genesis Deuteronomy) there are some remarkable links between the Peshitta and the Jewish Aramaic Targums; and some of the Prophets and Wisdom books the translators probably consulted the Septuagint on occasion, in order to seek help over a difficult passage in the Hebrew. The links with the Targums in certain books leads us to suppose that at least for these

books the translator(s) were probably Jewish, rather than Christian. In other books, however, the evidence perhaps points to Christian translators, though it is likely that such people were of Jewish oigin, for a knowledge of Hebrew would otherwise be difficult to explain.

For the student of Bible translations it is of particular interest to look at the distinctive features of a translation. Here we shall concentrate on some unusual interpretative renderings to be found in different books of the Peshitta Old Testament; many of these have their roots in Jewish exegetical tradition.

It was pointed out in Section 1 that even the translator who sets out to provide a literal translation cannot avoid choosing between two or more possible interpretations in cases where the Hebrew original is ambiguous or obscure. The Hebrew text of God's words to Cain in Gen. 4:7, "If you do well, will you not be accepted" (Revised Standard Version), is capable of several possible interpretations, owing to the ambiguity of the word "s't" ("will you not be accepted?" in the RSV). "s't" derives from the verb "nasa" which can have at least four different senses, all possible in the context:

(1) 'raise up', in the sense of 'offer'. This is how the Greek Septuagint takes it ("If you offer well ..").

(2) 'lift up', in the sense of 'accept'. The Syriac translator opts for this understanding, and he gives emphasis to it by changing the tense: he translates using a past tense, "qabblet" literally " I have received / accepted ", but in the context this will either have the nuance "I will certainly accept" (that is, if you (= Cain) act well in future), or "I would have accepted" (that is, if you had acted well on the first occasion). Two Jewish Greek revisers of the Greek Bible have a similar understanding of the word.

(3) 'lift up' in the sense of 'forgive'. This is how the Jewish Targums understood the passage ("you will be forgiven").

(4) 'lift up' in the sense of 'suspend'. This understanding of the word was chosen by the author of the Samaritan Targum

("I will suspend"). It is interesting to find that most modern translators base their renderings on the second interpretation, thus following in the footsteps of the Peshitta.

In the next verse (4:8) the Hebrew has evidently lost some words, for it reads "And Cain said to his brother (...). And when they were in the field Cain rose up against his brother bel and killed him". All the ancient versions, including the Peshitta supply some appropriate words, usually "Let us go out into the field". But the Peshitta translator does something else as well: instead of translating the Hebrew word "field" literally, he renders it by "valley" ("pqa'ta"). What is the reason for this seemingly wilful alteration? A clue to the answer is to be found in Ezekiel 28:12—14, where Paradise is described as a mountain. There is no hint of this in the Hebrew text of Genesis, but Jewish and Christian readers regularly understood the topography of Genesis 1—4 in the light of Ezekiel (the idea was also popularized in the non-canonical book known as Enoch): Paradise was understood as a mountain, and when Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise they took up residence on the foothills, at the mountain's base. Abel and Cain made their sacrifice on one of these foothills, but when Cain took abel off with the intention of killing him, he took him down on to lower ground, in other words, the "valley" which the Peshitta translator has actually introduced into the biblical text here. Early commentaries on the passage often understand the topography in this way, but the Peshitta is the only biblical translation which incorporates this understanding into the Bible itself.

According to the Hebrew text of Genesis 8:5 Noah's Ark landed on mount Ararat (in Armenia, modern north east Turkey) and 'Ararat' will be found in all modern translations. In the Peshitta, however, the Ark rests on 'the mountains of Qardu', that is to say, considerably further south, in Kurdistan (modern north west Iraq.) This was not, of course, a wilful rendering on the part of the translator: here, as in many other places, he is simply following Jewish tradition which was current in his day. 'Ararat' of the Hebrew text was identified as Qardu both by Josephus, writing in Greek in the later first century A.D, and by the Jewish Aramaic translations of the Bible, known as the

Targums. Thanks to this identification in the Peshitta, mount Qardu has been a place for local pilgrimage even into modern times.

Genesis 22, on Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, is a chapter to which we shall return later, in section 4. The Peshitta translation of the chapter already has a number of distinctive features. The two most prominet ones are in verses 2 and 12. Verse two provides the location where the sacrifice is to take place: the Hebrew text has 'the land of Moriah', which allowed later tradition to identify the place as the site of the Temple, since the only other occurrence of Moriah in the Hebrew Bible is at 2 Chronicles 3:1, which tells how 'Solomon began to build the House of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father'. Modern translations follow the Hebrew text in speaking of Moriah in both passages, but the ancient translators knew of some quite different traditions: the Greek Septuagint has 'high land' in Genesis and 'mountain of the Amorite' in Chronicles, while the Syriac Peshitta has 'land of the Amorites' in Genesis, and 'mountain of the Amorites' in Chronicles. The Latin translation known as the Vulgate knows yet another exegetical tradition, and in Genesis it has 'land of vision', an etymological rendering of Moriah, linking it with the Hebrew verb "ra'ah," 'to see'; Jerome derived this rendering from the earlier Jewish Greek revision of the Hebrew Bible by Symmachus.

The second distinctive feature of Genesis 22 in the Peshitta occurs in verse 12, where in the Hebrew (followed by the Septuagint and by all modern translations) the angel says 'for now I know that you fear God'. By contrast the Peshitta reads 'for now I have made known that you fear God' (the text was often later read as 'for now you have made known that you fear God', since the consonantal text "wd't" can be read either as "awd'et", 'I have made known', or as "awda't", 'you have made known'). This might not seem a very important difference, but in fact it implies a very different setting for this trial of Abraham: God allows the trial to take place, not to find out himself whether Abraham's love for God and his faith were stronger than his love for Isaac his son; rather, God allows it to take place because some of the angels doubt whether Abraham is worthy of the special

title given him of 'Friend of God'. The setting for the trial of Abraham is thus understood as being very similar to the setting for the trial of trials of Job, which were initiated because Satan, the 'Adversary', likewise doubted the strength of Job's faith. This understanding of the background to Genesis 22 is explicitly found in early Jewish exegetical tradition; the Peshitta, however is the only ancient translation to have introduced a hint of thi' interpretation into the actual biblical text.

The Peshitta translation of Genesis, and indeed of the Pentateuch as a whole, is particularly rich in links with contemporary Jewish exegetical tradition, and this makes it likely that these books were translated by Jews rather than by Christians.

Another place where the Peshitta translation has a great many distinctive renderings, often Jewish in character, is the two books of Chronicles. Here, for example, a number of the place names have been 'updated' and identified with places in north Mesopotamia which will have been more familiar to Syriac readers; thus, for example, Aram Ma'acah (1 Chr 19:6) is identified as Harran, and Carcemish (2 Chr 35:20) with Mabbug. Quite often the Syriac translator uses phraseology which is typical of the Jewish Targums (though there are very few links with the surviving Targum to Chronicles, which is probably later in date than the Peshitta). Thus were the Hebrew has 'In that night God appeared to Solomon (and said to him, Ask what I shall give you)', the Syriac has 'In that night the Lord was revealed over Solomon'. The wording 'was revealed over' is characteristic of the Jewish Palestinian Targum tradition (and is occasionally also found in the Peshitta Pentateuch), in contrast to the Babylonian Targum's regular use of 'was revealed to'. Another case where the Peshitta employs wording which is distinctively Jewish in character is to be found in passages like 2 Chr 33:7, where God speaks of his presence in the Temple; in that particular passage the Hebrew has 'in this House and in Jerusalem... I will put my name for ever', but in the Syriac the last phrase appears as 'I will cause my Shekhina (the divine presence) to reside for ever'. Such phraseology is chracteristic of the Jewish Targums, and is not to be found in any of the other ancient translations of the Bible.

One other book in the Peshitta has close links with the Targum, namely proverbs. Here the situation is unique, for the Peshitta and the Targum are virtually word for word the same much of the time, and one must definitely derive from the other. One would expect the Peshitta to be derived from the Targum, but on linguistic grounds it can be shown that in fact the Targum must derive in this book from the Peshitta. This means that the Peshitta translation of Proverbs is also likely to have been the work of Jews in north Mesopotamia: it subsequently came to be taken over by Syriac-speaking Christians and by later Jews (who lightly modified the dialect).

In other books of the Peshitta Old Testament the links with the Targums are much more tenuous, or altogether absent. In these other books the translators have introducd much fewer interpretative elements, and their rendering is usually rather close to the Hebrew, though in some books they occasionally make use of the Septuagint in isolated passages.

(2) TRANSLATED FROM GREEK: "SYRO-HEXAPLA"

Over the course of the fifth to Seventh centuries AD Christian literature in Greek came to have great prestige in the eyes of the Syriac Churches. This was due to a number of different reasons, but the most important of these was the fact that Greek was the main cultural language of the eastern Roman Empire and so the theological controversies of the fifth and following centuries were conducted primarily in Greek. Since Syriac readers were anxious to be brought up to date in theological developments huge numbers of theological works were translated from Greek into Syriac, and by the end of the Seventh century almost all the Greek Fathers had been translated into Syriac, either in whole or in part. As time went on, translators tried to represent the Greek more and more exactly in Syriac and by the Seventh century they had developed very sophisticated methods of 'mirror-translation', aimed at reflecting all the details of the Greek original in the Syriac translation.

It is against this general background of translation activity that we should look at the Seventh-century Syriac biblical translations, the Syro-hexapla for the Old Testament, and the Harclean for the New.

The Syro-hexapla was primarily the work of Paul, bishop of Tella, a scholar working at the monastery of the Antonines at the Ennaton (or ninth milestone), just outside the great city of Alexandria in Egypt. We know that he was engaged in the arduous task over the period 615—617, and these dates explain why he was not looking after his flock in Tella (in north Mesopotamia): in 614 the Persians had invaded the Roman Empire and siezed, not only north Syria and Mesopotamia, but also the holy city of Jerusalem. Only shortly after Paul completed his work they also took Alexandria, and it is fortunate that his translation was not lost then. Paul was thus a refugee, and it is worth remembering that this great work of scholarship was undertaken at a time of great political turmoil and uncertainty.

It seems that the translation was commissioned by the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Athanasius. Instead of using the ordinary text of the Septuagint, Paul worked from Origen's revision of the Septuagint, bringing it into closer line with the Hebrew original. Origen's revision, undertaken in the early third century, was incorporated into a massive six columned Bible known as the Hexapla ('Six-fold'), which probably contained: the Hebrew text, first in Hebrew characters and then in Greek transcription; two Jewish Greek translations (Aquila and Symmachus); Origen's own revision of the Septuagint; and another Jewish Greek translation, by Theodotion. Paul translated the fifth column, containing the revised Septuagint text, but in the margins he sometimes included information taken from the other columns; it is for this reason that his translation is known today as the Syro-hexapla (Syriac writers themselves refer to it under another name, 'the Seventy', that is, based on the Septuagint. Paul's translation reflects the Greek very closely, and this has proved most useful for modern scholars, seeing that Origen's Hexapla has been lost, apart from a few fragments (As we shall see below, in Section 3, Paul's own translation does not survive complete).

The Syro-hexapla enjoyed considerable popularity in the Syrian Orthodox Church and sometimes its text, rather than the Peshitta's, was used in Old Testament Lectionaries. Although Timothy I, the patriarch of the Church of the East, showed an interest in having a manuscript of the Syro-hexapla copied at the beginning of the eighth century, this version was never used in the Lectionaries of the Church of the East; it is, however, quite often referred to in several of the commentaries of the ninth century (see Section 5).

It is important to realize that the Syro-hexapla was not the only source of knowledge of the Septuagint's biblical text for Syriac readers. In the sixth century there were translations of some individual books of the Old Testament made from Greek (fragments of a version of Isaiah survive), and it is possible that these were commissioned by Philoxenus, bishop of Mabbug. Then in his old age, in the early years of eighth century, the great Syrian Orthodox scholar Jacob of Edessa undertook another translation from Greek, but also keeping some elements from the Peshitta. His work evidently covered several books of the Old Testament, but only a few survive today (Pentateuch, 1-2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel; some of these only in fragmentary form).

There was one further important source of knowledge of the Septuagint's biblical text: this was not in the form of an actual biblical translation, but was available indirectly, in translation of the Greek Fathers into Syriac. These Greek writers ofcourse quoted the Old Testament from the Septuagint, and when their works were translated into Syriac the practice of the Syriac translators from about AD 500 onwards was to translate the biblical quotations from the Septuagint exactly as they found them (earlier they had often adapted the quotations to the Peshitta text, since that was the biblical text which was familiar to their readers). It was through these translations of Greek patristic texts that many exegetical traditions based on the Septuagint, rather than on the Peshitta, reached the Syriac Churches; we shall later on look at passage where the differences between the Greek and the Syriac caused some intriguing problems which have left their mark in some liturgical texts (Section 7, on Gen 1:2)

2. New Testament

(1) DIATESSARON

The harmony of the four Gospels known as the Diatessaron is associated with Tatian, an important Syrian theologian who wrote in Greek just after the middle of the second century. Tatian had studied in Rome under Justin Martyr before returning to the east (his exact home is unknown). It is uncertain when, where, and in what language, he composed the Diatessaron; the original work is unfortunately lost, but traces of it can be found in the Christian west as well as in the Christian east. As far as the Syriac Churches are concerned, it is certain that the Diatessaron circulated widely in Syriac and that it was regarded as an authoritative form of the Gospel text until the early fifth century, when it was suppressed in favour of the separate four Gospels. In the fourth century St. Ephrem even wrote a commentary on the Diatessaron, and it is this work which is our most important witness to the actual text of the Diatessaron.

At the time when Tatian was compiling the Diatessaron the idea of a canonical set of four Gospels was only in its infancy. This explains why he felt able to take certain liberties with the text, even introducing here and there features which are not to be found in the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The following are three examples of such features.

In Matt. 4:4 and Mark 1:6 John the Baptist is said to have lived off 'locusts and wild honey'. Many later readers were surprised that an ascetic like John should have eaten a non-vegetarian diet, with locusts, and various interpretations were put forward suggesting that the Greek word in question in fact meant some sort of plant. Tatian evidently took a more radical course, removing the offending word used by Matthew and Mark altogether, and subsisting 'milk of the mountains'; John the Baptist, according to this new reading, lived off milk and honey, in other words, the food of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 6:3). The Old Testament association was certainly intentional on Tatian's part, for the entry into the Promised Land was seen as a typological counterpart to Christian baptism.

In the account of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan (Matt 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22) Tatian introduced a detail which is absent from the three Gospels: as Jesus entered the water 'a great light appeared'. This was certainly not an entirely new invention on Tatian's part; rather, he was simply adapting a tradition already in existence that fire had appeared at Jesus' baptism. In Tatian's theology (which we know of from his Oration to the Greeks) light is a much more important theological symbol than fire, and it is probably for this reason that he made the alteration (only one letter's difference in Syriac: "nura" 'fire', but "nuhra" 'light').

The familiar text of Jesus' words to Peter in Matt 16:18 reads 'on this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. Here the precise meaning of 'gates of hell' is far from clear; most modern translations take it as a metaphor and render it by 'powers of death' (thus e. g. Revised Standard Version, New English Bible). The Syriac Diatessaron had a rather different wording, employing 'bars of Sheol' instead (Sheol is the Hebrew and Aramaic term for the place of the dead). At first sight this leaves the passage just as obscure, but if we realize that the mention of 'bars' carries with it an allusion to two Old Testament passages, Psalm 107:16 and Isaiah 45:2, then the intention behind the alteration becomes clear: these passages, where God is described as 'shattering the doors of bronze and breaking the bars of iron', were interpreted in the early Church as referring to Christ's descent into Sheol. By introducing the allusion to these Old Testament passages which were taken as prefiguring Christ's descent into Sheol, Tatian is providing the reader with a clue how to Interpret Matt 16:18: Christ is promising Peter that the bars and gates of Sheol will not be able to prevail against the Church, just as they would not be able to prevail against him at his coming descent into Sheol; just as he would 'shatter the doors' and 'break the bars' of Sheol as he rose from the dead, so too would the Church at the final resurrection.

In two of these changes to the wording of the text Tatian has introduced allusions to the Old Testament. This is in itself of interest, for he was writing at a time when Marcion and his

followers were throwing out the Old Testament altogether from use in the Church.

The first and third of these alterations are known solely from Syriac and other eastern witnesses, and they have left no trace in the western Diatessaron witnesses, such as the medieval vernacular Gospel harmonies. Thus there is possibility that they are the work of the author of the Syriac Diatessaron, rather than of Tatian (supposing that he wrote the Diatessaron in Greek, rather than Syriac).

(2) OLD SYRIAC

The Old Syriac version of the New Testament is known to us only from two ancient manuscripts, both containing just the Gospels. There must have been a Syriac translation of the rest of Acts and the Epistles prior to the time of the Peshitta revision (c.400), since Ephrem comments on these books; very little, however, can be recovered of the actual wording of that part of the Old Syriac. In what follows the term Old Syriac will refer only to the Old Syriac translation of the Gospels.

The two manuscripts containing the Old Syriac Gospels are today known as the Curetonian (C; after William Cureton, its first editor) and the Sinaitic (S; since the manuscript belongs to St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai). Neither is complete, and the Sinaitic manuscript is often illegible since the original text has been sponged off and another quite different text has then been superimposed. Both C and S have the title 'Gospel of the Separated (Evangelists)', Ewangeliọn da-Mepharreshe, which is evidently meant to distinguish this version of the four separate Gospels from the 'Gospel of the Mingled (Evangelists)', Ewangelion da-Meḥallete, which refers to the Diatessaron.

The date when the Old Syriac translation was made is very uncertain, though it is now thought certain that it is later than the Diatessaron. The dates to which modern scholars have assigned the translation range from the late second century to the early fourth century (the two manuscripts themselves probably both belong to the fifth century).

The text of the Old Syriac quite often differs considerably from the Peshitta, and this is for two main reasons: (1) the Old Syriac translation was made from a Greek text which differed in many respects from the Greek text underlying the Peshitta revision; and (2) the style of translation is much more free (at least in many places). It is interesting that the translator clearly felt that the Syriac Old Testament (Peshitta) had greater authority for his readers than the Greek New Testament, for he adapts Old Testament quotations in the Gospels to the wording of the Peshitta Old Testament in a number of cases where this differs from the form of the quotation found in the Greek New Testament. This is in fact a practice adopted by many early Syriac translators of Greek patristic writings, and it is only from about AD 500 that translators change their attitude and prefer to translate biblical quotations in the form in which they find them in their Greek text, even when this may go against the wording of the Peshitta Bible.

The text of the two manuscripts is by no means identical, though they have enough in common to indicate that they are both witnesses to the same translation. Probably both manuscripts have a text which has been revised, or 'corrected' against the Greek here and there. This would explain, for examble, why S has the shorter ending of Mark (ending at 16:8), while C has the longer ending (concluding at 16:20).

As one might expect in the earliest surviving Syriac text of the Gospels, the Old Syriac contains a number of archaisms in grammar and vocabulary. Sometimes these have been taken to reflect Palestinian Aramaic forms (with the implication that the translators were either of Palestinian origin themselves, or possibly had access to oral traditions in Palestinian Aramaic): this suggestion rests on a misunderstanding, for the archaisms are best explained as survivals from an earlier stage in the history of Syriac itself.

(3) PESHITTA

The standard form of the Syriac New Testament, the Peshitta, is not a new translation from Greek, but a revision of

the Old Syriac, bringing it into closer line with the Greek. As we have seen, the two Old Syriac manuscripts C and S themselves show traces of sporadic revision. It seems likely that the process of revision which resulted in the Peshitta text as we know it was a long one, reaching its completion in the early fifth century. In its final form the revision seems to have been 'marketed' very successfully, for it evidently rapidly replaced the Old Syriac and Diatessaron and became the standard text for all the Syriac Churches. Traces of the older versions, the Diatessaron and Old Syriac, did nevertheless survive here and there, both as isolated readings in a few Peshitta manuscripts, and in quotations by later writers; thus, for example, the reading of the Syriac Diatessaron at Matt. 16:18, 'bars of Sheol' (as opposed to 'gates of Sheol' in both the Old Syriac and the Peshitta), is still known to many writers after the fifth century, long after the Diatessaron itself had been officially suppressed.

It has been suggested that the Peshitta revision was actually the work of the great bishop of Edessa, Rabbula (who died in 435). This, however, now seems unlikely, though Edessa (with its famous theological school) may have been the place from which the final form of the revision was propagated. It is interesting that many early Peshitta manuscripts contain the 'Eusebian canons', which provide a convenient system of cross references between the different Gospels (each Gospel is divided into numbered sections): perhaps this was a specific feature which accompanied the new 'edition' of the Syriac New Testament.

The Peshitta covers only those books which were regarded by the Syriac Chruch as authoritative, namely, the Gospels, Acts, the Pauline Epistles, James, I Peter, and I John. In early Peshitta manuscripts the Catholic Epistles come between Acts and the Pauline Epistles, and not after the latter. 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude and Revelation were not translated into Syriac until the sixth century (possibly as part of the Philoxenian version, though this is not at all certain). A number of isolated verses, familiar from English translations of the New Testament, are also missing from the Peshitta: Matt. 27:35 b, Luke 22:17-18, John 7:53-8:11 (the woman caught in adultery), Acts 8:37, 15:34 and 28:29; in modern printed editions these are usually supplied from some later version.

There is remarkably little variation between different manuscripts of the Peshitta New Testament: only a rather small number of Peshitta manuscripts preserve a few isolated readings which go back to the Old Syriac. There are, however, one or two passages of theological interest where variation has crept in. The most famous of such passages is the end of Hebrews 2:9, where manuscripts of East Syrian provenance regularly have 'for he (Jesus), apart from God, tasted death on behalf of everyone', while manuscripts of West Syrian origin have 'for by grace God tasted death on behalf of everyone'. The variation has its origin in the Greek; there the majority of manuscripts have 'by the grace of God' ("chariti theou"), but a very small number have 'without God' ("choris theou"). Scholars have long argued over which of these is the original reading, but as far as the Peshitta is concerned it would seem that 'by grace God' (slightly different from the Greek's 'by the grace of God') may belong to the original Syriac translation, while 'without God' was perhaps introduced into East Syrian manuscripts at an early date under the influence of Theodore of Mopsuestia's strong support for that reading (which for him had the advantage of avoiding any idea of the Godhead suffering at the crucifixion: it is only the Man who 'tasted death', not God the Word).

(4) PHILOXENIAN

There has been much confusion among scholars over the relationship between the Philoxenian and the Harclean versions of the Syriac New Testament, but some recently published commentaries on the Gospels by Philoxenus himself have provided a definite solution. Thus we now know that the Philoxenian version is lost, and that the very literal translation which does survive is the Harclean (despite the fact that its editor unfortunately gave it the title 'versio Philoxeniana').

The Philoxenian New Testament was not a completely new translation, but a revision of the Peshitta, commissioned by Philoxenus of Mabbug and carried out by his chorepiscopos Polycarp. The work was completed in 508. Although no manuscripts containing the Philoxenian survive, a number of quotations from it are preserved in Philoxenus's commentaries on the

Gospels; furthermore, in one of these (the Commentary on the Prologue of John) Philoxenus explains why he commissioned the revision. Philoxenus, who lived at a time of heated theological controversy, was unhappy with some rather free renderings in the Peshitta of passages such as Matt 1:1, 1:18, Heb 5:7, and 10:5, all of which have important theological implications for a proper understanding of the nature of the incarnation. Philoxenus complained that the rather loose rendering of these verses in the Peshitta gave possible scope for 'a Nestorian interpretation' (as he called it); accordingly he saw the need for a more exact rendering of the Greek new Testament into Syriac. He himself put it as follows:

> When those of old undertook to translate these passages they made mistakes in many things, whether intentionally or through ignorance. These mistakes concerned not only what is taught about the Economy in the flesh, but various other things concerning different matters. It was for this reason that we have now taken the trouble to have the Holy Scriptures translated anew from Greek into Syriac.

Philoxenus' comments on Heb 5:7 illustrate the sort of wording he was concerned about. First of all he quotes what he considers to be the correct translation of the Greek, 'He, who in the days of his flesh...'; he then goes on as follows:

> In place of this they (the Peshitta's translators) translated 'when he was clothed in the flesh', and instead of translating Paul they inclined towards the position of Nestorius, who cast the body onto the Word as one does a garment onto an ordinary body, or as purple is put on emperors (these are both favourite analogies among East Syrian writers).

From these and other remarks by Philoxenus himself, we can see that the prime motivation behind the Philoxenian New Testament was provided by the theological controversies of the time and the need for an accurate and literal translation of the Greek New Testament.

It is possible that the anonymous sixth-century translation of the minor Catholic Epistles (2 Peter, 2—3 John, Jude) and

Revelation may belong to the Philoxenian New Testament, in which case they would be the only surviving representatives of this version. The style of translation would seem appropriate for what we know of the Philoxenian, but against this we need to weight the fact that Philoxenus himself never seems to quote from these books, which would be a little surprising if he was the person who had commissioned their first translation into Syriac.

(5) HARCLEAN

The Harclean version represents the culmination of the long process of revision of the Syriac translation of the New Testament. Its author was Thomas of Harkel, who worked at the same monastery as Paul of Tella, outside Alexandria, and at the same time; he completed his work in 616. Their technique of highly sophisticated literal translation is very similar.

Thomas worked on the basis of the previous revision, the Philoxenian, and he covered the entire New Testament, including the minor Catholic Epistles and Revelation. In contrast to the Philoxenian, where the motivation seems to have been primarily theological, the Harclean displays a much greater interest in Philological detail: every particle of the Greek original is reflected in the translation. Thomas regularly strives to achieve a formal equivalence between the Greek and the Syriac text, with the result that it is possible for the modern scholar to reconstruct the Greek text which he must have used as the basis for his revision. As a matter of fact, Thomas did not confine himself to one Greek manuscript, for the colophon, or note at the end of the text, in many Harclean manuscripts speaks of his having used two or three different Greek manuscripts. It so happens that one of the Greek manuscripts which he used in Acts is of great interest for the study of the transmission of the Greek text of the New Testament, since it contains an archaic type of the textual tradition which is not well attested elsewhere.

The Harclean version soon became popular in the Syrian Orthodox Church and it was often used in Lectionary manuscripts, instead of the Peshitta. It was also used as the basis for a harmony of the four Gospels which covered the Passion narrative.

SECTION III

HOW DOES THE SYRIAC BIBLE REACH US?

In this section we shall look at the ways in which the Syriac Bible is transmitted to us. Needless to say, no autographs of any of the original translators survive; in the case of the Syro-hexapla and Harclean, however, we do have some manuscripts which must have been written less than a century after these translations had been made.

1. Biblical Manuscripts

A very large number of Syriac biblical manuscripts survive. These are always in codex, or book, format, and the writing material used is either vellum or paper (which was introduced in the Middle Ages). The manuscripts can vary in size, from the enormous 'pandects' containing the whole Old Testament or whole New Testament (very rarely both together), to miniature manuscripts written in a tiny script containing a single book or small group of books. The vast majority of manuscripts, however, are of more practical sizes, and normally they contain a group of books at a time. Occasionally one may find a biblical book incorporated into a manuscript which otherwise contains non-biblical texts.

Many manuscripts have a colophon, or note by the scribe, at the end, and this may give information about the place where the manuscript was written, and the date. Normally the date is given according to the Seleucid era, or 'reckoning of the Greeks', or 'of Alexander [the Great]', which began in October, B C 312; thus, for example, the year 771 of the Seleucid era will correspond to October 459 to September 460 in the Christian era.

The oldest dated Syriac biblical manuscript, a fragment of Isaiah in the British Library (Add. 14512), is in fact dated to 771 'according to the Greeks', that is, A D 459/60; another manuscript also in London (Add. 14425), containing Genesis and Exodus, is dated 463/4. For the Peshitta New Testament the earliest dated manuscripts belong to the early sixth century; there

are, however, some undated ones which probably belong to the fifth century.

A few manuscripts contain more than one different biblical version at the same time, arranged in parallel columns. Thus there is one fragmentary manuscript containing the Peshitta and Syro-hexapla of Isaiah set side by side. More frequently such manuscripts are genuinely polyglot, and have versions in different languages. One of the earliest polyglot manuscripts is a ninth-century Psalter, now in Leningrad: this has the Greek, the Syro-hexapla, and the Arabic texts set out in three columns. More ambitious in scope are a group of fourteenth-century manuscripts evidently written in Egypt, for the most part intended for liturgical use among the multi-lingual groups of monks in the Nitrian Desert. Two of these are Psalters which anticipate the earliest European polyglot Psalter of 1516: one of them has the text set out in five columns, containing Ethiopic, Syriac (Peshitta), Coptic, Arabic and Armenian; the other has the text in four columns, and this time the languages are Arabic, Syriac (Syro-hexapla), Greek and Hebrew. The inclusion of Hebrew in a Christian biblical manuscript at that time seems to be without parallel, and clearly the monk who compiled the manuscript must have been a remarkable scholar for his time.

As far as each individual Syriac version is concerned, we have the following picture:

OLD TESTAMENT (1) PESHITTA

There are very few manuscripts containing the complete Old Testament; it is significant that the majority of these belong to the seventeenth century, for by that time the invention of printing had accustomed people to the idea of a complete Old Testament, or a complete Bible: these manuscripts were in fact written only shortly before the first printed edition of the whole Syriac Bible (the Paris Polyglot, of 1645; see below, on EDITIONS). The four earliest manusripts containing (or once containing) the complete Peshitta Bible (Old and New Testaments) are:

— the codex Ambrosianus, in the Ambrosian Library, Milan, Italy (ms B. 21 Inf.; 7a1 in the Leiden edition of the Peshitta OT); this is written in a beautiful Estrangelo script, which can be dated to the sixth or seventh century.

— Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Syriac ms 341 (8a1 in the Leiden edition); this is written in a neat Estrangelo script belonging to the eighth century, and it contains some illustrations (portraits of Old Testament figures, and some scenes).

— Florence, Laurentian Library ms Or. 58 (9a1 in the Leiden edition); this is written in serto script which can be dated to the ninth century.

—Cambridge, University Library ms Oo. I. 1,2 (12a1 in the Leiden edition); this is written in a neat Estrangelo script which can be dated to the twelfth century; it also contains some illustrations in the form of small portraits of biblical persons. This manuscript has important connections with India, for it was once in Kerala. Although it was written in north Mesopotamia, the manuscript was taken to India, perhaps some time in the eighteenth century, for in 1806 the Syrian Orthodox bishop Mar Dionysius I (Mar Thomas VI) presented it to Dr. Claudius Buchanan, Viee-Principal of Fort William College, Calcutta. Dr. Buchanan had spoken to him of plans to print the Syriac Bible in England, and this was the reason for Mar Dionysius' generous gift. Use was indeed made of 'the Buchanan Bible' (as the manuscript came to be called) in preparing the printed edition, and when it was finally published (in 1823) copies were sent to Kerala. (This edition has recently (1979) been re-issued by the United Bible Societies).

If we compare the contents and order of books in these four complete Old Testaments, we will discover that they all differ in several respects both in the books they contain and in the order in which they give them. It is thus clear that neither contents nor order of books was regarded as being at all fixed. This is in fact hardly surprising when one remembers that manuscripts containing the complete Bible are the exception, and that normally a biblical manuscript will only contain a group of books (such as the Pentateuch) at a time.

The order of books in the oldest of these complete Peshitta Bibles, the codex Ambrosianus, has a number of interesting features which are worth looking at briefly; the order and contents are as follows: Pentateuch, Job, Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, Psalms, 1-2 Kings, Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Letters of Jeremiah and of Baruch, Baruch, Ezekiel, 12 Minor Prophets, Daniel, Bel and the Dragon, Ruth, Susanna, Esther, Judith, Ben Sira, 1-2 Chronicles, Apocalypse of Baruch, IV Ezra (Esdras), Ezra, Nehemiah, 1-4 Maccabees.

The contents have a number of surprises, for we find included here several books which are considered by most western Churches to be outside the Old Testament Canon, and among these are several which are not even to be found in the so-called 'Apocrypha' or Deutero-Canonical Books. This applies above all to the Apocalypse of Baruch and IV Ezra, both of which are long apocalyptic works of Jewish origin and dating probably from the late first century A D; the codex Ambrosianus is in fact the only Syriac manuscript to contain these two books in full (there are some extracts included in a few Lactionaries). Both books were translated into Syriac from Greek, but the Greek text does not survive (apart from a few fragments for the Apocalypse of Baruch); for IV Ezra there is also a Latin and a Georgian translation in existence, but for the Apocalypse of Baruch we have no other witness apart from this manuscript and a Later Arabic translation.

The order of the books also has a number of surprises. In the first place, we can observe that the scribe has for the most part tried to arrange them in historical order, according to the date of each book's supposed author. This explains why Psalms (attributed to David) comes between Samuel and Kings; and why the various books attributed to Solomon follow Kings. It also explains why Job follows immediately after the Pentateuch when one realizes that Job has been identified with Jobab (Gen 10:29); probably the same tradition was already known by the Essene Community at Qumran, for the only biblical manuscripts from Qumran written in the Old Hebrew script are books of the Pentateuch and Job: evidently this particular script was

reserved for books originating in the patriarchal period. This position for Job is in fact quite common in Syriac biblical manuscripts (thus it likewise follows the Pentateuch in both the Paris and the Cambridge complete Peshitta Bibles).

It will be noticed that codex Ambrosianus groups all the books on women together (Ruth, Susanna, Esther, Judith). This seems to have been quite a widespread practice from the sixth century onwards, and this group of books is often given the title 'the book of the Women'.

East Syrian manuscripts from the ninth century onwards usually have a group of books entitled Beth Mawtbe, or 'Sessions' (the reason for this title is obscure); this consists of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ben Sira, Job.

It is of interest to have some idea of the number of manuscripts containing parts of the Peshitta Old Testament. In the following list, arranged by century, it is important to remember that (1) the dating of Syriac manuscripts is often rather uncertain (only a few biblical manuscripts have dates provided in the colophones); and (2) the great majority of these manuscripts contain only a single group of books at a time (or sometimes only one book).

sixth century	— 27 mss	(often only one book, and often fragmentary)
seventh cent.	— 32 mss	(same applies).
eighth cent.	— 10 mss	
ninth cent.	— 12 mss	
tenth cent.	— 23 mss	
eleventh cent.	— 5 mss	
twelfth cent.	— 9 mss	
thirteenth cent.	— 7 mss	
fourteenth cent.	— 3 mss	
fifteenth cent.	— 6 mss	
sixteenth cent.	— 16 mss	
seventeenth cent.	— 26 mss	
eighteenth cent.	— 17 mss	
nineteenth cent.	— 23 mss	

For the rather large number of early manuscripts we owe a special debt of gratitude to the abbot Moses of the Syrian Monastery in the Nitrian Desert (between Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt), for in the early tenth century he collected together a fine library of old Syriac manuscripts which he acquired in Mesopotamia. Subsequently most of the manuscripts in the Syrian Monastery's library came to the Vatican Library (in the eighteenth century and the British Library (nineteenth century).

The earliest manuscripts are divided up into unnumbered paragraphs. It is intriguing to discover that in some books at least (notably Isaiah) these paragraph breaks very frequently occur at the same place as the paragraph breaks in the two Hebrew manuscripts of Isaiah from Qumran, as well as those in the traditional Hebrew text, reproduced in modern editions of the Hebrew Bible (the two systems are not identical, and the Peshitta represents a slightly different third tradition). Evidently the Syriac translator must have taken over the paragraph divisions from the Hebrew text he was translating. Later manuscripts of the Peshitta often introduce quite different paragraph breaks.

The earliest manuscripts have no chapter divisions. The division of books of the Peshitta Old Testament into numbered chapters (in Syriac, "shahe") is first attested in some East Syrian manuscripts of the eighth century; subsequently this system was adopted by West Syrian scribes as well. A few manuscripts (such as the Buchanan Bible) have two concurrent systems of numbering, the first being the standard system, and the other being a cumulative system running right through the Old Testament (or group of books within the Old Testament). It should be noted that these chapter divisions only very rarely coincide with the chapter divisions familiar from modern translations of the Bible (for whose origin, see Section 1).

Finally, before leaving the Peshitta Old Testament, we should look at the way in which the text itself has been transmitted over the centuries. On the whole one can say that Syriac scribes were generally very careful when they copied the biblical text. As a result, we find remarkably little variation between the different manuscripts (the situation is very different with the Sep-

tuagint, where great variation occurs); moreover, where variants do occur, they are only rarely of much consequence. Nevertheless the Peshitta text is not entirely uniform over the centuries, and recent studies have suggested that the following is the general pattern of development in the history of the Peshitta text for each book:

[1] Oldest stage. Very few witnesses to this stage survive, and often they are manuscripts which pose particular problems. It seems likely that in this oldest stage the text of the Peshitta was rather closer to the Hebrew original than is the case with the text during the later stages. If we had more manuscripts dating from the fifth century we would probably be in a better position to recover more of this archaic stage.

[2] The next stage is represented by manuscripts of the sixth to eighth centuries (inclusive); since we are rather well provided with manuscripts from this time, this stage represents the earliest stage in the history of the Peshitta text which we can recover. The difference between this stage and the oldest stage (not fully recoverable) are probably the result of attempts to smooth over the original translation here and there in the interests of good Syriac idiom.

[3] The third stage is provided by manuscripts of the ninth century and later, and is often referred to as the 'Textus Receptus', or Received Text. The differences between the Textus Receptus and the text of stage 2 are not very many (there are some 50 in the whole of Isaiah), and are rarely of great significance. It remains unclear how or why this development took place—was it a gradual process, continuing the sort of changes that had already taken place between stages 1 and 2, or was it the product of a conscious revision by a particular person (and if so, by what criteria did he work)?

The following are a few typical examples of differences between stages 2 and 3, taken from Isaiah:

Isaiah 13:8 'their eyes will not have pity on their children') Textus Receptus has 'your children'.

Isaiah 52:18 'there is none who takes her by her hand'] Textus Receptus adds 'and raises her'.

Isaiah 66:21 'And I will also take from them priests and Levites'] Textus Receptus omits 'And'.

Most of the changes are very minor, and are introduced in order to achieve smoother reading.

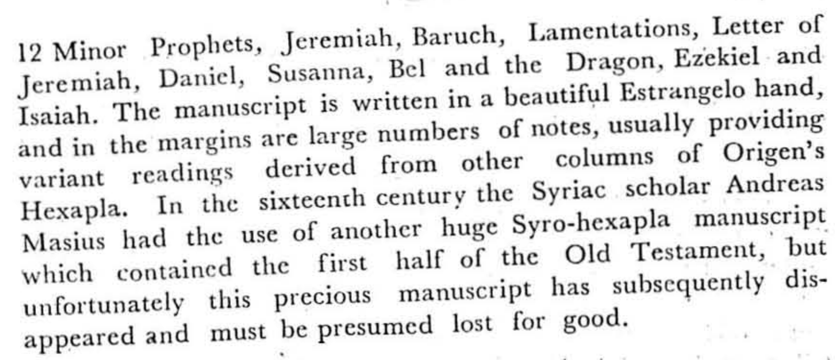
The Paris manuscript of the entire Peshitta Bible (Paris syr 341-8 a1) is of interest in this connection, for the text copied by the original scribe belongs to stage 2, but at some later date someone else has come along and systematically altered the text in order to make it conform to the Textus Receptus (stage 3).

[4] In the course of the later Middle Ages the Textus Receptus itself underwent some further developments, mostly involving very minor changes (probably due to the inadvertence of scribes.) It so happens that the earliest printed editions of the Syriac Bible employed late manuscripts, and so their text represents the latest stage in the history of the development of the Peshitta text.

OLD TESTAMENT [2] SYRO-HEXAPLA

Although several different early manuscripts of parts of the Syro-hexapla survive, these do not cover the entire Old Testament; the two earliest Syro-hexapla manuscripts (Add. 14442 with parts of Genesis; Add. 12134, with Exodus) were both written in the seventh century, thus less than eighty or so years away from the date of Paul of Tella's original translation. Some Syro-hexapla manuscripts contain single books, while others have groups of books.

The most famous Syro-hexapla manuscript, however, is an enormous manuscript containing the second half of the Old Testament, in the Ambrosian Library, Milan (ms C 313 Inf.); it is usually dated to the late eighth or early ninth century, and since the Syro-hexapla is translated from Greek, it is not surprising that the order of the biblical books is that found in many manuscripts of the Septuagint, namely Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira,



12 Minor Prophets, Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, Letter of Jeremiah, Daniel, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Ezekiel and Isaiah. The manuscript is written in a beautiful Estrangelo hand, and in the margins are large numbers of notes, usually providing variant readings derived from other columns of Origen's Hexapla. In the sixteenth century the Syriac scholar Andreas Masius had the use of another huge Syro-hexapla manuscript which contained the first half of the Old Testament, but unfortunately this precious manuscript has subsequently disappeared and must be presumed lost for good.

The Ambrosian manuscript of the Syro-hexapla has a system of chapter numbering which is quite different from the one found in Peshitta manuscripts; it derives from one of the several current Greek systems, and the Greek name kephalaion, 'chapter' (literally 'heading'), is employed. Rather surprisingly a later scribe has introduced this system into the margin of one famous Peshitta manuscript, the complete Bible, 7a1, also now in Milan.

We shall pass over here the two other translations of the Old Testament, made from Greek, the one possibly sponsored by Philoxenus, the other made by Jacob of Edessa in his old age. Both these survive in fragmentary form, in old manuscripts.

NEW TESTAMENT [1] DIATESSARON

No biblical manuscript containing any part of the Syriac Diatessaron survives, and the text has to be reconstructed from the quotations from the Diatessaron incorporated into Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron (which itself does not survive complete in Syriac).

NEW TESTAMENT [2] OLD SYRIAC

We have already seen that the Old Syriac survives in two fifth-century manuscripts, the Curetonian and the Sinaiticus. Neither of these is preserved in a complete state.

The Curetonian manuscript comes from the Syrian Monastery in the Nitrian Desert, and only a few years ago a missing leaf from the manuscript (now in London, Add. 14451) was

discovered among the Syriac manuscripts still remaining in the monastery (three further leaves found their way to Berlin). The Gospels are arranged in an unusual order, Matthew, Mark, John, Luke.

The Sinaiticus (St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, ms syr.30) was discovered in 1892 by Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, a remarkable and very learned Scottish lady who made many discoveries of biblical and other manuscripts in the middle East during the course of her travels with her twin sister, Mrs Margaret Smith Gibson. The original manuscript containing the text of the Old Syriac Gospels was recycled by a certain John the anchorite in AD 779: the writing was sponged off, and the leaves were re-used to form a new codex in which a totally different text was copied (Lives of some women saints). The manuscript as we know it today is thus a palimpsest, with the Old Syriac as the under-writing. Fortunately, a certain amount of the underwriting still shows through, and thanks to a great deal of patience, it was eventually possible to publish quite a large amount of this under-writing containing the Old Syriac. It is to be hoped that modern techniques for reading palimpsests will before long enable scholars to read rather more of this text which is of such interest for biblical studies.

NEW TESTAMENT (3) PESHITTA

Quite a large number of manuscripts from the sixth (and a few from the fifth) century survive; normally these contain just the Gospels (and many of them survive only in a fragmentary state), but one of the earliest dated manuscripts is one containing the Pauline Epistles (AD 533/4). Perhaps the most famous of early Peshitta New Testament manuscripts is a Gospel manuscript dated AD 586, in the Laurentian Library, Florence; this contains a remarkable set of illustrations, executed by the monk Rabbula (hence the manuscript is often referred to as 'the Rabbula Gospels'; this Rabbula should of course be carefully distinguish from Rabbula, bishop of Edessa).

The three Catholic Epistles (James, 1 Peter, 1 John) normally come between Acts and the Pauline Epistles. The order

of the Pauline Epistles is the same as the order familiar from the Greek and from modern translations. Sometimes at the ends of the individual Gospels and Pauline Epistles short historical notes are given, such as 'Ended is the preaching of Mark, which he uttered in Latin in Rome', or 'Ended is the Letter to the Romans, which was written from Corinth at the hands of Phoebe the deaconess'. Though such notices are not historically reliable, they are of interest since they show what views were current in the sixth century or so.

As is the case in the Peshitta Old Testament, there is remarkably little variation in text between different manuscripts of the Peshitta New Testament. Only in a few Gospels manuscripts can traces be found of the earlier Old Syriac version. One of the few major variants, at Hebrews 2:9, has already been mentioned at an earlier stage.

NEW TESTAMENT (4) PHILOXENIAN

In the past scholars have occasionally tried to identify particular manuscripts as containing the Philoxenian, version, but these attempts were misguided, and it is now realized that no manuscripts of the Philoxenian survive, with the possible exception of those which contain the sixth-century translation of the books absent from the Peshitta Canon. Our only direct access to the Philoxenian is thus by way of the quotations made from it which can be found in Philoxenus' commentaries and other works.

The sixth-century translation of the four Catholic Epistles absent from the Peshitta (2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude) is preserved in a fairly small number of manuscripts, of which the oldest is dated AD 823. Most of these manuscripts contain the rest of the New Testament in the Peshitta version (this, for example, is the case with the Buchanan Bible). For Revelation, however, the sixth-century translation is preserved in a single manuscript, dating from the twelfth or thirteenth century. As was mentioned earlier, it is not certain whether these anonymous translations are to be identified as part of the Philoxenian New Testament, or not.

NEW TESTAMENT (5) HARCLEAN

The vast majority of manuscripts of the Harclean version contain only the Gospels. Several of these belong to the eight or ninth centuries. For the rest of the New Testament, by contrast, we are not at all well off: for Revelation a small number of manuscripts are available, but only two manuscripts (Oxford, New College 333, of the eleventh century, and Cambridge, Add. 1700, of 1169/70) are definitely known to have the Harclean text of Acts and the Epistles as well.

2. Lectionaries

The Bible was read in the context of liturgical worship from the very beginnings of the existence of the Church (at first, of course, it was just the Old Testament, before the written New Testament had come into being). In the early centuries of the Church's life biblical manuscripts containing the relevant parts of Scripture were used. In the sixth century some Syriac biblical manuscripts provided help in locating lections by inserting lectionary headings (sometimes in red) at the beginning of passages to be read on particular feasts. Sometimes lists of readings throughout the liturgical year were compiled, but these did not include the text of the lections; a sixth-century index of lections of this sort survives in the British Library (Add. 14528). The practice of incorporating lectionary headings at appropriate places in ordinary biblical manuscripts continued in the seventh and eighth centuries, and sometimes later as well, even after the adoption of the bright idea of having separate books, containing just the lections, and arranged in their liturgical order.

It is unknown when this idea of having a special lectionary manuscript for lections was first introduced; the earliest Greek lectionary manuscripts (all very fragmentary) seem to belong to the fifth century, but the idea does not appear to have become popular until some centuries later. Certainly in the Syriac Churches it is the case that there are no Syriac lectionary manuscripts dating from earlier than the ninth century. It is ofcourse possible that earlier lectionary manuscripts did once exist, and that they have disappeared simply because they had more wear and tear than ordinary biblical manuscripts; this suggestion, however,

should probably be rejected, for two reasons: (1) since biblical manuscripts of the sixth and seventh century were provided with lectionary headings, they too would have been subject to the same wear and tear; (2) we suddenly have quite a lot of lectionary manuscripts dating from the ninth century, and belonging to all three Churches using Syriac as a liturgical language—the Syrian Orthodox, the Church of the East, and the Byzantine Orthodox (Melkite) Church in Syria and Palestine. It thus seems likely that the practice of collecting together the lections into special manuscripts was introduced into all the Syriac Churches at some time around A D 800.

Since different parts of the Bible were read at different points in the liturgical services, it became the usual practice to have separate lectionaries for Old Testament lections, for Gospel lections and for lections from the Acts and the Epistles. The text employed in lectionaries was normally the Peshitta, but in the Syrian Orthodox Church use was also sometimes made of the Syro-hexapla and of the Harclean. In particular, there are many Harclean Gospel lectionaries which survive. In some Gospel lectionary manuscripts a harmony has been created for the Passion narrative, based on the text of the Harclean; two different sequences are attested, and one of these is asssociated (in a colophon) with the names of a certain Rabban Mar Daniel and his disciple Isaac.

There appears to have been considerable variation in the allocation and arrangement of lections, not only between the different Syriac Churches, but also within each of the Churches. In the Church of the East two particular systems in due course came to dominate the scene: firstly the 'Cathedral' lectionary system of the patriarchal church formerly in Seleucia—Ctesiphon, and secondly the monastic lectionary cycle developed at the Upper Monastery in Mosul.

3. Printed Editions

The first printed edition of the Syriac New Testament was publised by Johann Widmanstetter in 1555 at Vienna. In the work of preparing the edition Widmanstetter had been

assisted by a Syrian Orthodox priest, Moses of Mardin, who spent some time in Europe acting as teacher of Syriac to various scholars. The text of this edition was often reprinted, sometimes in Hebrew characters.

For the Peshitta Old Testament the earliest printed editions were of the Psalter; the first was prepared by Martin Trostius in 1622, to be followed shortly afterwards by two other editions both of which were published in 1625, one in Leiden prepared by Thomas Erpenius, and the other in Paris prepared by the Maronite scholar Gabriel Sionita.

The next two Syriac biblical texts to be published were not from the Peshitta, but from one of the later versions. In 1627 Louis de Dieu published the Harclean Apocalypse (Leiden), and in 1630 Edward Pococke published the four minor Catholic Epistles which are missing from the Peshitta (Oxford); the version he published was the anonymous sixth-century one, rather than the Harclean in later literature on the Syriac versions they are often referred to as the 'Pococke Epistles'). None of these texts ofcourse featured in Widmanstetter's edition of the Peshitta New Testament, and their absence had surprised and even shocked European scholars.

The complete Old Tastament Peshitta was first published in volumes 6—9 of the great 'Paris Polyglot' (1645), edited by G. M. Le Jay; the edition of the Syriac text was the work of Gabriel Sionita. The Paris Polyglot also included the Syriac New Testament, supplementing the Peshitta text with the 'Pococke Epistles' and the Harclean Apocalypse.

The Syriac text of the Paris Polyglot served as the basis for the next edition of the Peshitta Bible, in Brian Walton's London Polyglot (1655—7).

In both the Polyglot Bibles the Syriac text is provided with a Latin translation. Their text is not a very good one since very late manuscripts (all West Syrian) were employed as the basis.

The next important edition of the Syriac Bible was that prepared by Samuel Lee, published in London in 1823. Although

the text was mostly derived from Walton's Polyglot, some use was made of the Buchanan Bible in preparing this influential edition. The Old Testament text is unvocalized but the New Testament is vocalized. The contents of the Old Testament were dictated by the contents of the King James Version of the Bible (the 'Apocrypha' are absent), though the order of the books in part follows patterns found in Peshitta manuscripts: thus, for example, Job comes between Deuteronomy and Joshua. In the New Testament, however, the standard order of editions of the Greek text (and of modern translations) was followed, that is, with the Pauline Epistles following immediately after Acts. For the books absent from the Peshitta, the 'pococke Epistles' and the Harclean Apocalypse are employed. An interesting feature of this edition of the New Testament is the presence of numerous lectionary headings, which have been taken over from one of the manuscripts which Lee used.

Lee's edition has been re-issued by the United Bible Societies (1979), in an expanded form, and with a brief preface by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Ya 'qub III. The added material is the text of the Deutero-canonical books, under the title 'Books of the Apocrypha'; these are reproduced from handwriting (Serto) and include the following: Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira, 2 Letters of Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, 1-2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, suppliments to Esther, Susanna.

The first printed edition of the Peshitta based at least in part on East Syrian manuscripts was published in Urmia (NW Iran) in 1852 by the American Presbyterian Mission. The edition has a Modern Syriac translation (from Hebrew, rather than from the Peshitta) in parallel columns. The Urmia edition served as the basis for another edition using the East Syrian script, published by the Trinitarian Bible Society in New York (1913) and often reprinted. Both these editions follow the order of books familiar from most English translations.

Another edition of the Peshitta using East Syrian manuscripts (and including the New Testament) was published by the Dominican Fathers at Mosul in 1887—92 (in three volumes); this had been prepared by Clement Joseph David, Syrian Catholic

Archbishop of Damascus, and George Abdisho Khayyat, Chaldaean Archbishop of Amid (Diyarbekir). The order of the Old Testament book is the same as that of the Urmia edition, but inserted among them are the so-called Deutero-canonical books (absent from Protestant Bibles), such as Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sira (between the Song of Songs and Isaiah). The New Testament follows the standard Greek order; for the books not in the Peshitta use is made of the 'Pococke Epistles' and the Harclean Ravelation.

The Beirut edition of the Peshitta (1952) is largely based on the Mosul edition.

All the editions mentioned so far are based on late and often not very good manuscripts. For most purposes this may not matter very much, but for more scholarly purposes it is obviously important to have a more reliable text of the Peshitta available, based on the oldest manuscripts. This is essential, for example, if one wishes to study the Peshitta Old Testament as a translation of the Hebrew.

In the last century or so various attempts have been made by scholars to produce better editions of the Syriac Bible. The following are some of the more important:

(a) Old Testament (Peshitta)

— Beginning in 1876 A.M. Ceriani started to publish a photo-lithographic reproduction of the Old Testament text of the famous Ambrosian manuscript of the Peshitta (7a1); this work, completed in 1883, made available for the first time the text of the oldest surviving manuscript of the complete Peshitta Old Testament.

— Various scholars have prepared editions of individual books of the Peshitta Old Testament, based on the oldest manuscripts available. These include: the Pentateuch (W. E. Barnes, 1914; a revision of the text in Lee's edition using old manuscripts) Psalms (W.E.Barnes, 1904); Isaiah (G. Diettrich, 1905; no text is given, but there is a full list of variant readings to be found in 22 manuscripts is given); Lamentations (B. Albrektson, 1963); Chronicles (W. E. Barnes, 1897; list of variant readings in several early

manuscripts, without the text); Apocrypha (P. de Lagarde, 1861; based on early manuscripts in the British Library); Wisdom of Solomon (J. A. Emerton, 1959).

— In the 1950s the International Organisation for the Study of the Old Testament began to make plans for a critical edition of the Peshitta Old Testament, and in 1959 Professor P. A. H. de Boer, of the University of Leiden in Holland, was appointed general editor. In 1961 the new Peshitta Institute at Leiden published a preliminary List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts, prepared largely by W. Baars and M. D. Koster. (Every now and then supplements to this invaluable basic list are published in the periodical Vetus Testamentum). Five years later, in 1966, a sample edition containing the Song of Songs, Tobit and the Apocalypse of Baruch was published. Over the following years the following volumes have appeared:

I	1	Genesis and Exodus (ed. T. Jansma, M. D. Koster, 1977).
II	2	Judges and Samuel (ed. P. B. Dirksen, P. A. H. de Boer, 1978).
II	3	Psalms (ed. D. M. Walter and others, 1980).
II	4	Kings (ed. H. Gottlieb and E. Hammershaimb 1976).
II	5	Proverbs, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (ed. A. A. di Lella, J. A. Emerton, D. J. Lane).
III	1	Isaiah (ed. S. P. Brock, 1987).
III	1a	Job (ed. L. G. Ringnell, 1982).
III	3	Ezekiel (ed. M. J. Mulder, 1985).
III	4	Twelve Prophets, Daniel, Bel and the Dragon (ed. A. Gelston, T. Sprey, 1980).
IV	3	Apocalypse of Baruch and 4 Esdras (ed. R. J. Bidawid, 1973).
IV	6	Canticles or Odes, Prayer of Manasseh, Apocryphal Psalms, Psalms of Solomon, Tobit, 1 (3) Esdras (ed. H. Schneider, W. Baars J. C. H. Lebram, 1972).

It is hoped to complete the edition some time in the 1990s. Estarngelo script is used throughout. The text printed is basically that of the Ambrosian manuscript, 7a1, though its manifest errors are corrected. Below the text there is an apparatus which gives all the variants to be found in manuscripts before 1300 (obvious errors and orthographical differences are excluded there, but receive mention in the introductions to each volume, where the manuscripts used are described). Editions earlier than 1977 give variants in later manuscripts as well, and the text in these volumes adheres more rigidly to 7a1 than is the case in later volumes. The importance of the Leiden edition lies in the fact that it provides for the first time information about the earliest forms of the Peshitta text, before the development of the medieval Textus Receptus (which is the basis of all the older editions of the Peshitta Bible).

(b) New Testament (Peshitta)

— For the Peshitta Gospels an edition (with facing Latin translation) based on a considerable number of the earliest surviving manuscripts was prepared by P. E. Pusey and published (after Pusey's death) by G. H. Gwilliam in 1901. The intention had been to cover the rest of the New Testament, but this never came to fruition; the provisional text for this edition, however, was published, without any variant readings, by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1920. This edition of the Peshitta New Testament, printed in vocalized serto script, is the most reliable one available, and it has been reprinted many times. The Syriac order of books is followed, with James, I Peter and I John coming after Acts. Use was made of the anonymous sixth-century translation for the minor Catholic Epistles (the 'Pococke Epistles') and Revelation, since these are absent from the Peshitta; the text of these was based on the excellent editions by J. Gwynn (minor Catholic Epistles, 1909; Revelation, 1897). These are all printed together at the end. For odd verses absent from the Peshitta (notably John 7:53 -8 :11) a later translation has been inserted between square brackets. Besides the western chapter and verse numbers, the native Syriac section numbers ("shahe") are given in the margin (these very rarely correspond with the western chapter divisions).

— In 1983 The Way International (New Knoxville, Ohio, USA) published a volume entitled 'The Aramaic New Testament, Estrangelo script, based on the Peshitta and Harklean Versions'. The Peshitta text is taken from three early manuscripts in the British Library, but for the books absent from the Peshitta, the text of Gwynn's editions of the anonymous sixth-century versions is used (the title page and Introduction mistakenly call them the Harclean). The order of books follows that of editions of the Greek text and of modern translations. Though in many ways this is a practical edition, with a good text and clearly printed, the absence of any punctuation marks (beyond dverse ivisions) makes for difficult reading, especially in the Epistles.

— The Institut fur neutestamentliche Text forschung at Munster (West Germany) is in the process of editing the Syriac New Testament in both the Peshitta and the Harclean versions. The first volume of this important scholarly enterprise covers the major Catholic Epistles (James, 1 Peter, 1 John), and was published in 1986 (ed. B. Aland). For the Peshitta a selected group of nine early manuscripts has been used, while for the Harclean all three available manuscripts are employed. A notable feature of this edition is the extensive use made of quotations from the New Testament in Syriac writers. The text of the Peshitta, Harclean and the various quotations is set out line by line so that that one can immediately see the differences between them. There is a long introduction dealing with the transmission of the text and the relationships between the Syriac texts and their underlying Greek originals.

(c) Main Syriac versions other than the Peshirta.

For the Syro-hexapla the most important editions are:

— the photo-lithographic edition of the Milan manuscript (C. 313 Inf.) containing the second half of the Syro-hexapla, published by A. M. Ceriani (1874).

— the collection of all Syro-hexapla texts available for the first half of the Old Testament by P. de Lagarde and A. Rahlfs (Bibliothecae Syriacae, 1892).

—a collection of New Syro-Hexaplaric Texts, edited by W. Baars (1968, with a valuable introduction on the history of earlier editions).

—a photographic edition, by A. Voobus, of a Syro-hexapla manuscript of the Pentateuch dated 1204 (1975).

For the anonymous sixth-century version of the minor Catholic Epistles and Revelation, mention has already been made of the editions by Gwynn (1897 for Revelation, 1905 for the minor Catholic Epistles).

The only edition of the Harclean New Testament was publised long ago by J. White (Gospels, 1778; Acts and Epistles, 1799, 1803). The work was given the misleading title Versio Syriaca Philoxeniana; today, however, it is known for certain that the text of White's edition is the Harclean, and not the Philoxenian. The end of White's manuscript is lost, and so his edition ends at Hebrews 11:27. The rest of Hebrews was published from another manuscript by R. Bensly (1889). The Harclean text of Revelation, first published by L. De Dieu in 1627, appears in most subsequent editions of the Syriac New Testament published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A photographic edition of a further manuscript of the Harclean text of Revelation has recently been published by A. Voobus (1978). There is also a separate edition of the Harclean text of St. John (G.H.Bernstein, 1853).

(d) Tools

There are no complete concordances to the Syriac Bible available yet. For the Peshitta Old Testament there are a number of concordances to individual books available (mostly prepared by W. Strothmann and assistants); these are based on some of the older printed editions.

A concordance to the Peshitta New Testament was prepared by A. Bonus, but this has never been published. The so-called Concordance to the Peshitta Version of the Aramaic New Testament (1985) is in fact not a concordance, but a word list. A handy Syriac-English dictionary to the Syriac New Testament was published by W. Jennings (1926).

4. Translations

The Peshitta has been translated into a number of different languages over the course of its history; most of these are old ones, such as translations into Persian and Sogdian (only fragments of these survive). Many translations of different parts of the Peshitta into Arabic were made in the Middle Ages, and one sometimes finds (especially in lectionary manuscripts) the Syriac and Arabic in parallel columns (the Arabic often written in Syriac script, known as Karshuni).

In the Polyglot editions of the Bible the Peshitta text was provided with a Latin translation.

The only complete English translation of the Peshitta is by G. Lamsa. This is unfortunately not always very accurate, and his claims that the Peshitta Gospels represent the Aramaic original underlying the Greek Gospels are entirely without foundation; such views, which are not infrequently found in more popular literature, are rejected by all serious scholars.

There is an older English translation of the Peshitta New Testament by James Murdock (1893).

A good modern translation of the Peshitta, or at least of passages used in the lectionary, is very much needed.

There seem to be at least three translations of the Peshitta New Testament into Malayalam.



SECTION IV

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE SYRIAC TRADITION

The Bible can be interpreted on many different levels. For our present purpose it will be sufficient to follow the practice of several Syriac writers and to distinguish between two different modes of interpretation. St. Ephrem already makes the distinction between 'factual' and 'spiritual' interpretation (today we might prefer to call the first of these 'historical'). The factual or historical interpretation is primarily concerned with illuminating the circumstances surrounding episodes in the Bible: who were the people involved, when and where did they live, and so on. The spiritual interpretation, on the other hand, is concerned with the eternal truths underlying the text; it seeks to penetrate beyond the surface meaning to the various inner meanings.

Where historical interpretation is concerned we are dealing with facts, and we can speak of a historical interpretation as being 'correct' or 'incorrect', or as 'right' or 'wrong' (though often we do not have sufficient evidence to decide conclusively between the two). This is quite different from the situation with spiritual interpretation: here it is not a case of one interpretation being right and another wrong, for there is never one 'correct' interpretation to the exclusion of all others. Often several spiritual interpretations may be simultaneously valid. For a spiritual interpretation to be valid, it must be meaningful in a particular context; and to be meaningful, it must provide insight on the world of objective spiritual truth or reality. These two criteria are important: the first helps us to realize that the same spititual interpretation may be valid (that is, meaningful) to one person, but not to another; or it may be meaningful to the same person at one time, but not at another. The second criterion is important because spiritual interpretation which provides insight on objective spiritual truth is much more likely to be found within orthodox Christian tradition than in some other form of Christianity which is given to an individualistic and highly subjective interpretation of Scripture.

Historical and spiritual interpretation of Scripture thus operate in very different ways, each with its own mode of operation. Historical interpretation provides us with the outer meaning, spiritual interpretation directs us towards the inner meaning of the biblical text. The two approaches should complement one another, but all too often their proper roles have been misunderstood, and the criteria belonging to the one have been misguidedly applied to the other. This has given rise to all sorts of misconceptions, such as the idea that biblical scholarship is dangerous or harmful to faith. Much more dangerous, and spiritually harmful, is the fundamentalist approach to the Bible which confuses spiritual truth with historical truth, thus creating a totally unnecessary conflict between religion and science.

With these rather lengthy preliminaries we can now turn to the Syrian interpretation of Scripture. The Syriac Fathers are interested both in 'factual', or 'historical', and in 'spiritual' interpretation, though not surprisingly they pay greater attention to the latter. Since modern historical understanding of the Bible and its background is vastly superior to that of the Syriac Fathers (thanks to the advances in biblical scholarship over the last century), what the Syriac Fathers have to say on the level of historical interpretation is very rarely of more than antiquarian interest. What they have to say in the area of spiritual interpretation, however, has by no means been superseded, and much of what they say can be just as meaningful today as it was to their own times. Accordingly, we shall primarily be looking at examples of their spiritual interpretation.

A number of passages in the writings of St. Ephrem (died 373) provide us with excellent guidance on how Scripture should be read. On the one hand he sees the Scriptures themeselves as possessing an unfathomable depth of 'hidden power' (that is, spiritual meaning; western writers would probably prefer to speak of divine inspiration). On the other hand, in order for the Christian to be able to draw on these hidden depths of spiritual meaning, he or she must read the Bible with 'the eye of faith', that is, with an openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for this same Spirit will then lead the reader to discover 'the power which lies hidden' within the words of



the biblical text. Thus, for the Bible to 'come to life' and to become spiritually meaningful there is need for openness to, and co-operation with, the Spirit on the part of the reader (or hearer) of the Bible, for only then will the reader become aware of the spiritual truths hidden within scripture. Thus St. Ephrem says in one of his hymns, "The Scriptures are laid out like a mirror, and he whose eye is lucid sees within them the mirror of Truth" (Hymns on Faith 67:8).

St. Ephrem says emphatically on a number of occasions that it is wrong to read the Bible in a literal way, for this will lead to all sorts of misconceptions. Thus, for example, in one of his hymns on Paradise (11:6) he says,

> If someone concentrates his attention
> solely on the metaphors which are used of God's majesty,
> he then abuses and misrepresents that majesty
> by means of those same metaphors
> with which God has clothed himself for man's own benefit;
> such a person is ungrateful to God's grace
> which has bent down its stature to the level of human childishness:
> Even though God has nothing in common with humanity
> nevertheless he clothed himself in the likeness of humanity
> in order to bring humanity to the likeness of himself.

Ephrem often speaks of God as 'clothing himself in names (or metaphors)' in the Old Testament, as a prelude to his 'clothing himself in the human body' at the Incarnation. But we should not abuse God's condescension in making himself known to humanity in this way by taking these metaphors literally:

> Let us give thanks to God
> who clothed himself in the names of the body's various parts:
> Scripture refers to his 'ears',
> to teach us that he listens to us;
> it speaks of his 'eyes', to show that he sees us.
> It was just the names of such things that he put on.
> Although in his true Being there is no wrath or regret,
> yet he put on these names too, because of our weakness.

We should realize that, if he had not put on the names of such things,
it would not have been possible for him
to speak with us humans:
he drew close to us by means of what belongs to us;
he clothed himself in our language, so that he might clothe us
in his mode of life. He asked for our form (Philippians 2:7)
and put this on; then, as a father with his children,
he spoke with our childish state.

It is our metaphors that he put on—though he did not literally do so!
He then took them off—without actually doing so:
when wearing them, he was at the same time stripped of them;
he puts one on when it is beneficial,
then strips it off to exchange it for another.
The fact that he strips off and puts on all sorts of metaphors
tells us that the metaphor does not apply to his true Being;
because that Being is hidden,
he has depicted it by means of what is visible.

(Hymns on Faith 31:1-3)

A passage of Scripture is capable of only one correct historical interpretation at a time; such a restriction, however; does not apply to spiritual interpretation: in that case, the more lucid and luminous the inner eye of faith is, the more spiritual interpretations it will be capable of discovering. As Ephrem points out, it would be very boring if a passage of Scripture had only one spiritual meaning;

If there only existed a single sense for the words of Scripture, then the first commentator who came along would discover it, and other hearers would experience neither the labour of searching, nor the joy of discovery. Rather, each word of our Lord has its own form, and each form has its own members, and each member has its own character. And each individual person understands according to his capacity, and he interprets the passage as is granted to him. (Commentary on the Diatessaron 7:22).

Earlier in the Commentary on the Diatessaron St. Ephrem has the following excellent advice (in the first paragraph he addresses Christ):

> Who is capable of comprehending the extent of what is to be discovered in a single utterance of yours? For we leave behind in it far more than we take away from it, like thirsty people drinking from a fountain.
>
> The facets of God's word are far more numerous than the faces of those who learn from it. God depicted his word with many beauties, so that each of those who learn from it can examine that aspect of it which he likes. And God has hidden within his word all sorts of treasures, so that each of us can be enriched by it, from whatever aspect he meditates on. For God's word is the Tree of Life which extends to you blessed fruits from every direction; it is like the Rock which as struck in the Wilderness, which became a spiritual drink for everyone on all sides: 'They ate the food of the Spirit and they drank the draft of the Spirit'.
>
> Anyone who encounters Scripture should not suppose that the single one of its riches that he has found is the only one to exist; rather, he should realize that he himself is only capable of discovering that one out of the many riches which exist in it.
>
> Nor, because Scripture has enriched him, should the reader impoverish it. Rather, if the reader is incapable of finding more, let him acknowledge Scripture's magnitude. Rejoice because you have found satisfaction, and do not be grieved that there has been something left over by you. A thirsty person rejoices because he has drunk: he is not grieved because he proved incapable of drinking the fountain dry. Let the fountain vanquish your thirst: your thirst should not try to vanquish the fountain! If your thirst comes to an end while the fountain has not been diminished, then you can drink again whenever you are thirsty; whereas, if the fountain had been drained dry once you had had your fill, your victory over it would have proved

to be for your own harm. Give thanks for what you have taken away, and do not complain about the superfluity that is left over. What you have taken off with you is your portion; what has been left behind can still become your inheritance. (Commentary on the Diatessaron 1: 18-19)

The type of spiritual interpretation which is employed most frequently by the Syriac Fathers can best be described as typological or symbolic interpretation. This kind of interpretation can already be found in the New Testament, where, for example, St. Paul speaks of Christ as 'the latter Adam' (1 Cor 15:45). Typology is in fact a means of indicating relationships: relationships between the Old Testament and the New, between the New Testament and the Church, between the material world and the heavenly world, between historical events and persons in Scripture and their spiritual meaning. Types and symbols serve as pointers: from the standpoint of subjective human perspective, a type or symbol can be seen as means of revealing some aspect of objective divine reality (Truth, in Ephrem's terminology); alternately, from the standpoint of objective divine perspective, a type or symbol is a place in which some aspect of divine reality lies hidden. Although the Greek word for type, "typos", does sometimes occur in Syriac, the normal term used for type or symbol is "raza", which properly means 'mystery', but which is usually best translated in this context as 'symbol', though it should be stressed that 'symbol' has a much stronger meaning than the one current in modern English, where a symbol is usually sharply distinguished from the thing it symbolizes. For the Syriac Fathers the link between symbol and the reality symbolized is intimate, for in the symbol there resides the 'hidden power' of the reality.

The verse John 19:34 is a passage which excellently illustrates the mechanics, as it were, of typological exegesis. The Peshitta has here: But one of the soldiers struck him on his side with a spear, and immediately there came forth blood and water. With the help of typology the piercing of Christ's side on the Cross is linked backwards to the Genesis narrative of the fall of Adam and his expulsion from Paradise, and forwards to the sacramental life of the Church; in other words, the typolo-

gical interpretation of this verse points to the true significance of the crucifixion and its importance as the turning point in the whole of salvation history. How does it achieve this?

First, the links with the Genesis narrative are provided by the following contrasted elements:

— the side of Christ the Second Adam, and the rib, or side, of the First Adam (Gen 2:21-2), whence Eve was extracted;

— the spear which pierced Christ, and the fiery sword which kept Adam out of Paradise (Gen 3:24).

The piercing of Christ's side with the spear can thus be seen as removing the fiery sword which has hitherto kept Adam (humanity) out of Paradise; in other words, the crucifixion opens up the posssbility for humanity to return to the original state of Paradise.

Secondly, links forward to the Church are provided by:

— the blood, a symbol of the Eucharist;

— the water, a symbol of Baptism.

Moving on from here a further step, the Syriac Fathers speak of the Church (as the place where the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are found) coming forth, or being born, from the side of Christ. This in turn provides a contrast to Eve, who was 'born' from the side of the First Adam. The image of birthgiving then allows the introduction of another set of relationships: the birth of Eve from Adam and the birth of the Church from Christ were both virgin births (as too was the birth of Adam from the Earth), and this ofcourse introduces the virgin birth of Christ from Mary, herself the Second Eve.

We are thus provided with an extremely intricate web of typological relationships which help to show how every point in salvation history is interlinked, and how we today are ourselves participants in this history through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. The typological parallelism implied in this network of interrelationships between Mary and the Church also provides fruitful and suggestive material for theological meditation.

Such, in prosaic terms, is the bare skeletal framework upon which the typological interpretation of John 19:34 functions. For the skeleton to come to life, one needs to read some of the passages where the Syriac Fathers have breathed life into these bare bones. (See Suggested Reading, at the end of the Course).

It is significant that much of the best spiritual interepretation of the Bible among the Syriac Fathers is to be found in poetry rather than in prose. Thus the poems of Ephrem, Narsai and Jacob of Serugh will appear today as far more creative in their spiritual interpretation of Scripture than the many later prose commentaries which survive.

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The desert will rejoice,
and flowers will bloom in the wilderness.
The desert will sing and shout for joy;
it will be as beautiful as the Lebanon Mountains
and as fertile as the fields of Carmel and Sharon.
Everyone will see the Lord's splendour,
see his greatness and Power.

SECTION V

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

Commentaries on the Bible can take many forms. The earlier Syriac commentaries are generally on one particular book at a time, whereas from the eighth and ninth century onwards it became the fashion to provide commentaries on the whole Bible.

The earliest surviving Syriac commentaries are those by Ephrem (c. 306—373), and it is quite likely that they date from the last ten years of his life, spent at Edessa. The following are generally agreed to be by Ephrem himself (though in some cases it is possible that his disciples published them in their present form):

— Commentary on Genesis and most of Exodus; this survives in Syriac in a unique manuscript. The Commentary follows the order of the biblical text, but only selected passages are commented on. The early chapters of Genesis receive much more attention than the later ones, and Ephrem shows great interest in the question of human free will. There is very little typological interpretation; this contrasts with the typological interpretation given to many passages from Genesis and Exodus in his hymns. Throughout the commentary many intriguing links with Jewish exegetical traditions are to be found.

— Commentary on the Diatessaron. This survives complete in an early translation into Armenian; in recent times about two-thirds of the Syriac original have been recovered and published (1963; the discovery of some more leaves of the same manuscript was announced in 1987). The Commentary follows the sequence of the Diatessaron (and since the Syriac Diatessaron is lost, the Commentary is an extremely important witness to both its text and structure); as in the Genesis and Exodus Commentary, Ephrem is selective in the passages upon which he chooses to comment, but the commentary itself is much more theological in character; further more many passages are meditative in character.

— Commentary on Acts. This comparatively short work survives only in an Armenian translation.

— Commentary on the Pauline Epistles. This too survives only in an Armenian translation. A curious feature of this commentary is Ephrem's inclusion of a non-canonical letter attributed to Paul, known as 3 Corinthians. This letter was evidently quite widely read in the early Syriac Church, but later fell out of favour (it is clearly not genuine).

Thanks to Ephrem's enormous reputation; many works not by him came to be attributed to him. This applies to almost all the commentaries on the Old Testament attributed to him in the eighteenth-century edition of his works. There are also Armenian translations of Old Testament commentaries under his name, but these have not yet been critically studied, and so it is not yet possible to say whether they preserve any genuine material from the pen of Ephrem.

Following chronological order, probably the next Syriac commentaries to survive are certain works by John of Apamea,or John the Solitary. Much uncertainty surrounds this figure and the works under his name, which include a commentary on Ecclesiastes and one on the Beatitudes. Neither of these has been yet published (though an edition of the former is promised as imminent). These are not commentaries in the modern sense; instead, Johh uses select passages in the biblical text as spring-boards for teaching on the spiritual life.

From the middle of the fifth century onwards Syriac commentators come under the influence of some of the main Greek commentators of the late fourth and early fifth century. These Greek writers fall into two main schools of exegesis, generally known as the Antiochene and the Alexandrian. As far as later Syriac exegetical tradition was concerned, the most important representative of the Antiochene school of exegesis was Theodore of Mopsuestia (died 428), while for the Alexandrian school it was Cyril of Alexandria.

The Antiochene school was particularly interested in historical interpretation, and from the point of view of modern biblical scholarship this school was the more critical in its approach, even anticipating in some respects the findings of modern critics. Representatives of this approach often adapted

to the Bible techniques which had been developed by scholars of pagan Greek literary texts. Many of Theodore's works were translated into Syriac in the course of the fifth century, probably at the famous Persian School in Edessa; it was through this school, and its successor (from 489) at Nisibis, that the Antiochene exegetical tradition came to exert a pervasive influence on many Syriac writers. In the Church of the East, where Theodore was regarded as the Exegete par excellence, and where Theodore's christology was considered normative, it is no surprise to find his exegesis as dominant too. But it is also the case that Theodore and the Antiochene exegetical tradition exerted a considerable influence on writers of the Syrian Orthodox tradition like Jacob of Serugh and even Philoxenus; this happened for the simple reason that these men had once themselves been students at the Persian School, and though they reacted against its theological teaching, they nevertheless remained influenced by its tradition of biblical interpretation.

Since Theodore of Mopsuestia later came under a cloud of disapproval in the Greek Church, most of his writings have been lost in Greek. Many of his works which have managed to survive are known only from their translation into Syriac; amongst these is a long and important Commentary on St. John's Gospel. Quite extensive portions of his Commentary on the Psalms is also available in Syriac.

In passing it should be noted that a great many of John Chrysostom's exegetical homilies on different books of the Bible were translated into Syriac at an early date; to judge by the number of manuscripts which survive, these were widely read. Other works translated into Syriac were Athanasius' Exposition of the Psalms (in a longer and a shorter form) and Gregory of Nyssa's famous Commentary on the Song of Songs.

The Alexandrian exegetical tradition was distinguished from the Antiochene by its willingness to employ allegory as a method of biblical interpretation (Theodore in particular was strongly opposed to the use of allegory). It would be a mistake, however, to think that all Alexandrine interpretation is allegorical: much of it would best be described as typological, and in

this respect it has much in common with its Antiochene counterpart. Alexandrine exegesis has left much less of an impression on subsequent Syriac tradition, even though Syrian Orthodox writers had available in Syriac translation several of Cyril of Alexandria's Commentaries (his Commentary on Luke, in the form of a series of homilies, survives only in Syriac translation).

The two great Syriac poets, Narsai (died c.500) and Jacob of Serugh (died 521) both stand in the Antiochene exegetical tradition, even though Jacob rejected Antiochene christology. Many of their verse homilies ("memre") are in effect commentaries on particular biblical passages; both poets, for example, have a series of homilies on Creation.

Philoxenus of Mabbug (died 523) has left commentaries on the Prologue of St. John, and on Mathew and Luke (these two survive only in fragmentary form). The commentary on the Prologue of John is in the form of an extended theological exposition.

The Church of the East produced a number of commentators in the sixth century, but little is known of their work today. One of the more influential of these commentators was Ahob of Qatar (in the Gulf) whose work is known only from quotations in much later writers. Among the recent finds of Syriac (and other) manuncripts at St. Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai it has been reported that there is an otherwise unknown commentary on the Bible by the great East Syrian theologian Babai (died 628).

The chief luminary in the field of Syriac biblical exegesis in the seventh century was undoubtedly the Syrian Orthodox scholar Jacob of Edessa (died 708). Jacob, like many West Syrian authors of his time, knew Greek well; he also knew a little Hebrew, which was exceptional for a Christian scholar of that time. He displays his knowledge of Hebrew in a long and learned note on the Tetragrammaton, the Hebrew divine name written Y H W H but read as Adonay ('my Lord', for which the Septuagint has Kyrios and the Peshitta Marya, both meaning 'Lord'). This particular note is attached to his revised translation of the Homilies of Severus of Antioch, but he has also left a whole

series of scholia and letters on particular biblical topics in which he displays considerable critical acumen. His most important work of exegesis, however, is his Commentary on the Six Days of Creation (Hexaemeron). It had become a tradition by his time for commentaries on the opening of Genesis to be the vehicle for a great deal of scientific knowledge, ranging from zoology to geography. Jacob's commentary certainly lives up to this tradition, and it is a storehouse of learning on all sorts of topics. Jacob had left the work unfinished at his death, and so it was left to his equally learned disciple George, bishop of the Arab tribes (died 724) to complete it.

The names of several East Syrian commentators (such as Hnana of Adiabene and Gabriel of Qatar) are known from quotations in later writers, but it is not until the late eighth and the ninth century that we have surviving commentaries. From that period we have a number of important works:

— the Book of Scholia, by Theodore bar Koni (late eighth century); this is in the form of sets of questions and answers on select topics in every book of the Peshitta Bible. (The idea of a biblical commentary in the form of a series of Questions and Answers was taken over from Greek writers such as Theodoret). The Book of Scholia comes down to us in two different recensions, both of which have been published in the Louvain Corpus of Oriental Christian Writers (C S C O).

— A Commentary on the whole Bible again in the form of Questions and Answers, by Isho'barnun, Catholicus of the Church of the East from 823—828. Only the section on the Pentateuch has been published so far (by E. C. Clarke, 1962).

— An anonymous commentary on Genesis and Exodus (to 9:32); this has recently been published by L. van Rompay (1986) in the C S C O.

— An anonymous commentary on the Old and the New Testament; only the section on Genesis 1—17 has been published so far (A. Levene, 1951).

— Commentary on the Old and New Testaments by Isho'dad of Merv (flourished c. 850). The Commentaries on the Old Testament have been published by C. van den Eynde in the C S C O (1950–81), and those on the New Testament by M. D. Gibson (1911–13).

All these works contain a considerable amount of material in common, and they all serve as repositories for earlier exegetical tradition.

The chief Syrian Orthodox commentators of not from the ninth century are John of Dara and, especially, Moshe bar Kepha, several of whose commentaries on different books of the Old and New Testaments survive. Only the Commentary on John by Moshe has been published in full so far.

In the first half of the eleventh century the East Syrian scholar Abdallah ibn at-Tayyib (died 1043) wrote a number of biblical commentaries in Arabic, based largely on the earlier Syriac commentary tradition. These were widely read by Arabic-speaking Christians from all Churches, and their influence has even reached the Ethiopian commentary tradition.

An extensive commentary on the East Syrian lectionary, called the Gannat Bussame (Garden of Delights), belongs to the early thirteenth century. This work preserves many excerpts from earlier commentators whose works are otherwise lost. (An edition by G. Reinink in the C S C O is in preparation).

A fitting climax to the West Syrian commentary tradition is provided by the "Awsar Raze", or Storehouse of Mysteries, by the Syrian Orthodox polymath Gregory Abu'l Faraj, usually known as Bar Hebraeus (died 1286). This great work covers the entire Syriac Bible. Only parts of the "Awsar Raze" have so far been published (the most accessible, with English translation, cover Genesis to Samuel (M. Sprengling and W. O. Graham, 1931), and the Gospels (E. W. Carr, 1925).

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SECTION VI

THE USE OF THE SYRIAC BIBLE IN PREACHING

The Bible has always been the main starting point for preaching in all Christian traditions. Here we shall concentrate on some features which are characteristic of the Syriac tradition and which are not found widely elsewhere.

The place of poetry has always been very prominent within Syriac literature as a whole; it is thus not surprising to find that poetry plays an important role in preaching and in the exposition of the Bible in the Syriac Churches. Two areas are particularly noteworthy: the use of dialogue poems, with biblical characters, in order to highlight decisive moments within the biblical narrative; and the use of verse homilies for the purpose of retelling biblical episodes in a dramatic fashion. Both these may be seen as excellent vehicles for popular catechetical instruction which deserve to be revived today.

The dialogue poems belong to a very ancient literary genre which can be traced back at least to the second millennium B.C. In their Syriac form these poems consist of short stanzas where the two biblical characters speak in alternating verses; there is almost always a short narrative introduction, providing the audience (the congregation) with the biblical setting, and there is sometimes a very brief conclusion (often in the form of a doxology). The poems normally take the form of an argument between the two biblical characters, and in the end one of the two speakers wins over the other. Thus, for example, in the dialogue between the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary (the scene of the Annunciation, Luke 1:26—38), the Virgin is mindful of Eve's experience, and so questions the angel at first:

> The angel addressed the Virgin and said,
> Peace be with you, O mother of my Lord,
> blessed are you, child,
> and blessed is the Fruit that is within you.

And Mary says, Who are you, sir?
and what is this that you utter?
What you are saying is remote from me,
and what it means I have no idea.

Angel The Father has revealed to me, as I do now to you,
this mystery which is shared between him and his Son,
when he sent me to say
that from you he will shine out over the worlds.

Mary I am afraid, sir, to accept you,
for when Eve my mother accepted the serpent
who spoke as her friend,
she was snatched away from her former glory.

Human experience and the dictates of reason also provide a basis for further questioning on Mary's part:

Mary This meeting with you and your presence here
are all very fine, if only the natural order of things
did not stir me to have doubts at your arrival
as to how there can be fruit in a virgin's womb.

It is only when the angel finally mentions the Holy Spirit that Mary finally accepts;

Angel I was sent from the Father to bring you this message,
that his love has compelled him
so that his Son should reside in your womb,
and over you the Holy Spirit will reside.

Mary In that case, O angel, I will not answer back:
if the Holy Spirit shall come to me,
I am his maidservant, and he has authority;
let it be to me in accordance with your word.

These dialogue poems provide a very effective means of pin-pointing moments of dramatic tension within the biblical narrative. At each such dramatic point the poet (usually anonymous) explores the inner psychological tensions and thoughts; in the process of doing so, he successfully brings out the important

underlying theological teaching of the passage in question. In many cases these poems deal with the conflict between the head and the heart, between human reason and faith: we have seen a little of this in the dialogue between the Angel and Mary, but it is also very prominent in the dialogues between Zechariah and the Angel, and between Joseph and Mary. Zechariah finds it impossible to believe the angel's message that his barren and elderly wife will bear a son: he tells the angel 'It would be astonishing if I were to believe you in the matter of this tale which you have told me: a tree already dried up cannot possibly provide fruit'. In vain does the angel tell Zechariah of the Old Testament precedents, such as Sarah giving birth to Isaac in her old age; Zechariah remains stubbornly sceptical: 'However much you speak trying to persuade me, your words still do not touch my intellect'. In Zechariah's case human reason proves the victor over faith—with the result that Zechariah was made 'unable to speak until the angel's words came to pass'.

In the case of Joseph, on the other hand, faith eventually wins the day, even though external appearances—his fiancee's obvious pregnancy—make it very hard for him to believe in Mary's improbable explanation, as appears near the beginning of the dialogue:

Joseph I am astounded at what you say:
how can I listen to your words?
Virgins simply do not get pregnant
unless they have intercourse or get married.

. . .

Mary's patience in the face of his angry disbelief eventually, towards the end of the long dialogue, wins over Joseph, and he half concedes that Mary might be telling the truth:

Joseph There are two possibilities, and both disturb me:
if what you say is true, it is most frightening for me,
but if it is untrue, that is a great grief.
How I wish I could escape from the two.

To this Mary replies:

> Now I shall pour out my words
> and address my Son hidden within my womb;
> he will reveal to you that I shall have no other children,
> and that I shall not be deprived of your company.

This is the final verse of the dialogue, but in the final narrative we hear that verification of the truth of Mary's words is provided for Joseph:

> Joseph slept, and the angel arrived,
> revealing to him how the mystery had taken place.
> Joseph rose up early and knelt in worship before Mary
> full of wonder, who had not lied.

The dialogue poem between Mary and Joseph illustrates how it is only after the intellect has given way to the improbable claims of faith that external verification if provided (in Joseph's case, in the dream), showing that this faith is indeed grounded in reality.

Some fifty such dialogue poems survive, and the majority of these involve biblical characters. Based on the Old Testament we have: Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22); Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39), Joseph and Benjamin, and Job and his wife. The dialogues with New Testament topics are rather more numerous, and include: Zechariah and the Angel, the Angel and Mary, Joseph and Mary, Mary and the Magi, John the Baptist and Christ, John the Baptist and the Crowd, Christ and the Pharisees, Christ and the Synagogue, the Sinful Woman and Satan, the two thieves on the cross, the Cherub and the thief (Luke 22: 42—3), Death and Satan (at the descent of Christ into Sheol), and Mary and the Gardener (the risen Christ).

The oldest dialogue poems are by none other than St. Ephrem (some on Death and Satan); most of these poems, however, are anonymous, though in the East Syrian tradition they have usually been ascribed to Narsai. Probably many of them

will have been written in the fifth or sixth centuries, for this was a period of great literary creativity. But later writers also continued to use this form of dialogue poetry to good effect.

Syriac literature is extremely rich in verse homilies, and many of these are by the great poets Ephrem (died 373), Narsai (died about 500), and Jacob of Serugh (died 521). A large number of these homilies provide sermons in verse on particular biblical passages, exploring their spiritual meanings, making creative use of typology. In these the readers (or hearers) are always aware of the preacher himself standing between them and the biblical text, providing exhortations and explanations. There is, however, also a smaller number of verse homilies were the biblical narrative is retold in dramatic fashion; in these there are no homiletic asides. This retelling of biblical narratives makes ample use of speeches by the various biblical characters involved: some of these speeches can already be found, in very brief form, in the biblical text itself. But more often the poet has supplied both the occasion as well as the words; in so doing he is reading between the lines, as it were, of the biblical text, and drawing out the dramatic potential to be found there.

Once again, most of the narrative poems of this sort are anonymous (though they are often wrongly attributed to Ephrem). It seems likely that they mostly belong to the fifth and sixth centuries. Among the subjects covered we find the following: Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Genesis 12), Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac (Genesis 22), Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37–48; the long cycle of poems on this subject by the fifth century poet Balai is often wrongly ascribed to Ephrem), the prophet Elijah and the widow of Sarepta (1 Kings 17), the prophet Jonah (this alone is genuinely by Ephrem), Mary and Joseph (making use of motifs in the Proto-Gospel of James), and the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Christ (Luke: 7: 36–50 and parallels).

The two narrative poems retelling the episode of the sacrifice of Isaac are of particular interest since they introduce the figure of Sarah, who is not mentioned a single time in the course of the biblical text of Genesis 22. In retelling the biblical narra-

tive the poet seeks to explore the silences of the actual text of the Bible, and to draw out what could be implicit within those silences. What were Sarah's reactions when Abraham took off her young boy? Did Abraham tell her off God's fearful command? Preachers in the early Church were clearly intensely concerned with such questions, and they suggested a variety of possible answers. Usually they assume that she only let Isaac go because she was unaware of what Abraham had been instructed by God to do. In one of the two Syriac narrative poems on the subject, however, we have a quite different approach: Sarah is portrayed as having the same profound faith in God's ultimate love as her husband Abraham has, for she is both aware of what is to happen and consents to it. Indeed, as it turns out, her faith proves even greater than Abraham's, for she has to endure the testing of her faith twice: when Abraham and Isaac return home to her, Abraham at first goes in alone, saying to Isaac 'I will spy out your mother's mind'. Sarah is thus left to imagine that Isaac has indeed been sacrificed, and she welcomes her husband back with these words:

> Welcome, blessed old man, husband who has loved God;
> welcome, happy one, who has sacrificed on the pyre my only child;
> welcome, o slaughterer, who did not spare the body of my only child.
> Did he weep when he was bound, or groan when he died?
> was he looking for me?

Abraham assures her that Isaac did not cry when he was bound, and that 'when the knife was above his throat, he remembered you there'. To this Sarah replies:

> May the soul of my only child be accepted,
> for he listened to his mother's words.
> If only I were an eagle, or had the speed of a dove,
> so that I might go and behold that place
> where my only child, my beloved, was sacrificed!

Only at the end of this speech does Isaac walk in, safe and sound, to fall into his mother's astounded embrace.

Although the poet handles the biblical narrative with a good deal of freedom, he does so in order to impress on his readers and hearers the underlying message inherent in the biblical text; this he does by means of various dramatic effects which he introduces into the retelling of the biblical story. We should not, ofcourse, suppose that he is trying to provide a historical reconstruction of the episode: this would be to misunderstand his intentions totally and completely.

The narrative verse homily on the prophet Elijah provides another example of the way in which the poet seeks to heighten the dramatic force of the biblical narrative. 1 Kings 17:1 tells how the prophet bound the skies under an oath, not allowing them to let fall any rain or dew 'except by my word'. The resulting drought was to be a punishment for the nation's wicked ways. Later on in the chapter the biblical narrative tells how the same prophet restored life to the dead son of the Widow at Sarepta (1 Kings 17:22). Then, at the end of chapter 18, we learn of the end of the terrible drought. In the biblical account no direct connection between the raising of the widow's son and the end of the drought is made, but the author of the Syriac verse homily on Elijah does link the two in a very dramatic way (in so doing, he was in fact following Jewish tradition). When the heavens complain to God about Elijah's action, God points out to them that he should respect his prophet's authority, seeing that Elijah had specifically stated that the heaven were bound until he himself release them. 'Be patient with me for a little while', God tells the heavens, 'and wait until I go down to visit him. I will go on proposing to him reasons, until he eventually becomes reconciled with you'. After various attempts to get Elijah to lift his ban and so end the drought, God finally sends him off to a widow of Sarepta who will feed him despite the famine. She tells him that all she has left over is a little flour in a bowl and a small quantity of oil (1 Kings 17:12), but the prophet assures her:

> Neither shall the bowl of flour fail
> nor shall the horn of oil give out.

The woman runs off 'to try out the word of the prophet', and as 'she plunged her hand into the bowl, flour came leaping up

to meet it'—and the same thing happened with the oil. The prophet, the widow and her son are thus assured of food, and all goes well for a while. But the drought and the famine continue, since Elijah has not yet lifted his ban. Things are getting so bad that God decides to resort to something more dramatic in order to get Elijah to relent and show compassion:

He sent an angel to take away
the soul of the widow's son.
He took away his soul, and so incited his mother
to do battle with the upright man:
the woman took hold of him and stood there,
ready to argue with him as a murderer.
'Give me back my only child', she cried,
'for he was killed because of you.
I will seize hold of you straightaway
and thrown you into the hands
of Ahab and Jezebel, to meet an evil fate'.
Elijah answered her and said
to the widow who had spoken these things:
'Never has anyone been killed by me,
and here you are calling me a murderer.
Am I God, to be able to revive your son?
Or is his soul in my hands,
seeing that you are requiring him at my hands?'

The woman said in reply to Elijah,
'Indeed, by the God whom I serve,
this is assured for me:
if the flour heard you and leapt up,
and if the oil heard you and spurted forth,
then the Lord will listen to you thus
and will give you back the soul of the boy.'

Then Elijah took the boy
and brought him to the upper room;
he knelt and began to say
in sorrow and in suffering,
'O Lord, I beg of you,
as a servant I speak in your presence;

why, Lord, have you repaid with such loss
this widow who has received me?
Why did you send me to her,
why did you bring her son forth from her womb?
Lord, I call upon you with feeling,
I beg of you mercy;
listen, Lord, to your servant's prayer,
and return the soul of this boy'.

Our Lord answered and said to Elijah;
'You owe me one debt:
repay it, and I will listen to you.
In your hands is placed the key to the heavens,
in my hands is the soul of the child'.
The holy man opened his mouth
as his heart rejoiced and exulted;
he released the heavens which he had bound
— and the soul of the child returned.

In order to heighten the dramatic effect of the biblical narrative the poet has introduced the bold idea of a bargain struck between God and Elijah. This has the effect of emphasizing the double underlying message which the poet sees in the biblical narrative: the need for compassion on the part of those who are zealous for God's righteousness, and the example of the widow's faith in God's ability to work miracles through his prophet.

By retelling the biblical narrative in a lively and imaginative way, these anonymous Syriac poets have provided a very effective form of popular preaching. The very fact that they take some liberties with the biblical text encourages their readers and hearers to go back to the biblical text and re-discover it for themselves.

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SECTION VII

THE USE OF THE SYRIAC BIBLE IN THE LITURGY

The Syriac Bible features in liturgical worship above all in the cycle of biblical readings and in the use of the Psalms. Here, however, we shall consider another aspect: the way in which the phraseology of the Syriac Bible is ingrained in the very prayers and hymns of the Syriac Churches. We shall look at two examples, based on Genesis 1:2 and on Luke 1:35.

The second half of Genesis 1:2 reads in the Peshitta 'and the Spirit of God was hovering ("mrahhefa") over the surface of the water'. The verb "rahhef" is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 of a female bird hovering over her chicks, and the noun "mrahfana" is found several times in the Peshitta as a parallel to "mrahmana", 'compassionate'. Modern English translations usually provide two possible alternative translations for Genesis 1:2, 'the Spirit of God' and 'wind of God' (or, 'strong wind'), since "ruah" in Hebrew (and "ruha" in Syriac) can mean either 'spirit' or 'wind'. This hesitation on the part of modern translators is in fact nothing new, for the early Church Fathers were also divided over how to interpret the verse: does it refer to the Holy Spirit, or to a spirit/wind? The fact that the Greek has a passive verb following ('was carried') suggested to some Greek commentators that 'the spirit' here could not refer to the Holy Spirit.

The Syriac Fathers share this uncertainty over the interpretation of Genesis 1:2, and many of them, from St. Ephrem onwards, prefer not to introduce the Holy Spirit here in their exegesis of the passage. This line of interpretation was adopted in order to avoid certain theological misunderstandings associated with the verse, and it was followed by several later commentators, and in particular by Theodore of Mopsuestia, from whom it was taken over by the School of Edessa and by its successor at Nisibis. Accordingly, the vast majority of later Syriac commentaries, especially those in the East Syrian tradition,

take the view that the 'spirit of God' in the verse is not the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, in spite of this attitude on the part of some theologians, it seems that a different understanding was deeply ingrained in the liturgical tradition, for there we can find many passages where Genesis 1:2 is understood as referring to the Holy Spirit. This can be seen above all in prayers and hymns connected with baptism; here we often find a parallelism drawn between the creative activity of the Holy Spirit over the primordial waters, on the one hand, and the same creative activity of the Spirit over the baptismal waters, where the baptized become a 'new creation'. Thus in one of the Epiphany Hymns attributed to St. Ephrem we have:

> At creation the Spirit hovered over the waters;
> they conceived and gave birth to reptiles, fish and birds.
> The Holy Spirit has hovered over the baptismal water,
> and has given birth to eagles in symbol, that is, to the virgins and leaders,
> and to fishes in symbol, that is, to the chaste and the intercessors,
> and to reptiles in symbol, that is, to the cunning who have become as
> simple as doves (Matthew 10:16). (Hymns on Epiphany 8:15)

The same idea is also found in the Maronite baptismal rite, in the course of the long prayer at the sanctification of the water:

> As the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters at the establishment of creation, so may your Holy Spirit, O Lord, hover over this baptismal water which is a spiritual womb, and may he rest upon it and sanctify it and make it fruitful with the heavenly Adam, in place of the earthly Adam.

The parallelism between the waters at creation and the baptismal water is richly suggestive, but it is rarely brought out in an explicit way--perhaps as a result of the different exegesis of Genesis 1:2 which dominated the Schools of Edessa Nisibis. But very often we do find the parallelism vestigially present,

thanks to the use of the verb "rahhef" in connection with the activity of the Spirit at baptism. Thus St. Ephrem, who specifically does not take the 'spirit of God' to refer to the Holy Spirit, nevertheless does use the verb "rahhef", 'hover', with reference to baptism when we says 'The Holy Spirit hovers over the streams' (that is, of the baptismal waters) [Hymns on Virginity 7:8]. Likewise, in some texts of the Syrian Orthodox baptismal service the deacon says at the sanctification of the baptismal water, 'How fearful is this hour when the living and Holy Spirit circles down from the uppermost heights and "hovers" and dwells on the water, sanctifying it, just as the Jordan's streams were sanctified [at the baptism of Christ]'.

Likewise, outside the context of baptism and the baptismal liturgy, we not infrequently find the Spirit described as 'hovering', where the verb 'hover' is derived from the Peshitta text of Genesis 1:2. Thus in several West Syrian Anaphoras 'hover' is used as one of the verbs describing the activity of the Holy Spirit at the Epiclesis. One such case is the Syriac Anaphora ascribed to St. John Chrysostom (quite different from the Greek Anaphora under his name):

> May your Spirit and your Power overshadow this holy altar and sanctify its offerings; and may He hover and rest and reside over the bread, and may it become one Body....

The wording of this particular epiclesis conveniently introduces us to the other biblical passage under consideration in this section, for the verb 'overshadow' is derived from Luke 1:35, 'The Holy Spirit shall come and the power of the Most High shall overshadow ("naggen") you'.

The Syriac verb used to translate the Greek word here for 'overshadow' is a very interesting one, for it has a background in Jewish Aramaic. The verb "aggen" occurs a number of times in the Jewish Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible, almost always in the context of God's salvific activity. The Syriac translators of the New Testament evidently inherited the term from Jewish Aramaic and used it in a number of different passages, including Luke 1:35. Among the other passages where

the translators, employed this verb "aggen" are John 1:14 (where the Greek has 'The Word dwelt, or tabernacled, among us') and Acts 10:44 and 11:15 (where the Greek has 'the Spirit feel upon...').

As was the case with Genesis 1:2, so too with Luke 1:35 there has been a difference of opinion about its precise interpretation. Is 'the Power of the Most High' the same as 'the Holy Spirit' earlier in the verse, or is the Power to be identified as the divine Word? On the whole one can say that East Syrian exegetical tradition identified the Power as a synonym for the Holy Spirit, while West Syrian tradition normally understood 'the Power of the Most High' to refer to the pre-existent Word; several exceptions can, however, be found to this pattern of interpretation in both traditions. In the case of the West Syrian tradition it is clear that the Peshitta's use of the same verb, "aggen" at John 1:14 has been influential, for there the Word is subject of the verb.

In view of this difference over the interpretation of Luke 1:35, one would expect to find reminiscences of Luke 1:35, where the Holy Spirit is understood to be the subject of the verb 'overshadow', only in East Syrian liturgical texts, and not in West Syrian ones. This, however, is not the case, and in fact we find many such reminiscences in both liturgical traditions.

It is particularly significant when reminiscences of Luke 1:35 occur in the Epiclesis of the Eucharistic Liturgy. In the East Syrian liturgical tradition this occurs in the East Syrian Anaphora of Theodore, where the invocation opens with the words 'May the grace of the Holy Spirit come upon us and upon this offering and reside in and overshadow this bread...' In West Syrian Anaphoras the use of 'overshadow' in the epiclesis is especially common, and the example quoted above, from the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom, is only one out of many Anaphoras where 'overshadow' is used at this point.

The use of the word 'overshadow' in the epiclesis deliberately draws attention to the important parallelism between the activity of the Spirit over Mary and the activity of the Spirit

over the eucharistic Offerings. In his Commentary on the Liturgy the Syrian Orthodox writer Moshe bar Kepha says

> Just as the Holy Spirit descended to the womb of Mary (as the angel said, 'for the Holy Spirit shall come...'), and made the body of God the Word from the flesh of the Virgin , so too the Spirit descends on the bread and wine on the altar and makes them into the Body and the Blood of God the Word which originated from the Virgin.

The implications of this implicit parallelism between the Annunciation and the Eucharist are important. At the Annunciation Mary's willing co-operation with the Spirit resulted in the birth from her of God the Word; at the Eucharist there are two different aspects of the activity of the Spirit: firstly, through the Church's faithful co-operation with the Holy Spirit at the Epiclesis, the eucharistic Offerings are transformed and become the Body and Blood of Christ; secondly, if those who receive Communion imitate Mary's willing co-operation with the Holy Spirit, they too will give birth spiritually to God the Word. Thus the eighth-century East Syrian mystic, Joseph the Visionary, writes in a prayer to be recited before Communion, 'May I receive you, Lord, not into the stomach which belongs to the body's limbs, but into the womb of my mind, so that you may be conceived there, as in the womb of the Virgin'.

Syriac liturgical texts are full of such biblical reminiscences, and the theological richness of these texts will only become truly apparent when these reminiscences and allusions are recognized. Sometimes these allusions refer to wording which is found uniquely in the Peshitta (this applies to some extent, at least, to the two examples quoted above; it also applies notably to the form of the Sanctus in the Syriac liturgies, for the wording 'heaven and earth are full of his "praises" ' (rather than 'his glory') is taken from the Peshitta text of Isaiah 6:3). Because Syriac liturgical prayers and hymns are so soaked in the phraseology of the Syriac Bible, we can accordingly see the importance of having translations based on the Peshitta for the purposes of liturgical readings from the Bible.

SECTION VIII

THE PESHITTA AS THE BASIS FOR SYRIAC SPIRITUALITY

The Peshitta is the source for a great many terms which were to become important in the history of Syriac spirituality. Before looking at a few of these in more detail, we can notice the following in passing:

— the term "rushma", or 'mark', is rugularly used in early Syriac literature for the baptismal anointing on the forehead (or, by extension, it may also refer to the whole baptismal rite). The source for the term is the Peshitta text of Ezekiel 9:4, where the prophet Ezekiel has a vision of the slaughter of the guilty in Jerusalem; in this vision 'a man clothed in linen', evidently an angelic being, is told by God to pass through the city of Jerusalem and 'put a mark "rushma" on the foreheads of those who groan in torment over all the abominations and evil doings that are being performed in the city'. In Hebrew the word for 'mark' here is "taw", the letter T, whose shape in the old Hebrew script was that of a cross. At the pre-baptismal anointing the priest anoints a cross on the forehead of the person being baptized with oil, which symbolizes (among many other things) protection against the forces of evil.

— in East Syrian writers like St. Isaac of Nineveh (7th century) concept of 'pure prayer' becomes a very important one. The only biblical version where the actual term 'pure prayer' occurs is the Peshitta, at 1 Chronicles 16:42: 'These holy men (who were ministering before the Ark of the Covenant) gave praise, not with musical instruments of praise, .. but with a joyful mouth and with pure and perfect prayer'.

— one of the central concepts of Syriac spirituality is the ideal of "shafyutha"; the Syriac term has no single English equivalent, but covers a whole variety of different ideas, such as 'lucidity, luminosity, purity, clarity, serenity'. In the Syriac Bible there are a number of important passages where the adjective "shafya", 'clear, luminous', etc., occurs; in some of these the

term is used to describe a path or way, such as Isaiah 26:7, 'Straight and clear ("shafya") is the way of the righteous'. But the most important passage is Luke 8:15, where the term is associated with the heart: 'The seed in the good ground refers to those who hear the Word with a luminous ("shafya") and good heart' (the Greek has 'an excellent and good heart'). Taking this as their starting point, later Syriac writers frequently refer to the ideal of "shafyut lebba", 'luminosity of heart'.

– another important and distinctive term in the history of Syriac spirituality is "msarrquta" 'self-emptying'; this is used both in the sense of the stripping away of external possessions, and in an interior sense, 'the self-emptying of heart', the stripping away of self-will in order to follow the will of Christ. Such 'self-emptying' is in fact an imitation of Christ's own self-emptying, based on St. Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:7, 'Christ emptied ("sarreq") himself, taking the form of a servant.

– Syriac tradition makes great use of the imagery of clothing in expressing many different theological ideas. In particular, the theme of the 'robe, or garment, of glory/praise' is commonly used to describe the whole course of salvation history: in Paradise Adam and Eve were clothed in the garment of glory before their disobedience to God's command. At the Fall humanity lost this garment, and the whole purpose of the Incarnation was to make it possible for humanity to put on, once again, this garment of glory; to bring this about, God the Word 'put on the body' at the incarnation, and then, at his Baptism in the river Jordan, he places the garment of glory in the Jordan water, ready for the individual christian to put on at his or her baptism in the baptismal water. In this world the baptized possess this garment of glory in potential, but it only becomes a reality in the world to come—provided they have kept the garment unsullied by sin in the present life. The image of the robe or garment of glory thus links together all the main points in salvation history, and thus vividly brings home the close relationship between the individual christian today and these past events in salvation history. Earliest Syriac christianity evidently took the idea of Adam and Eve being clothed in paradise with the robe of glory from an early Jewish interpretation of Genesis 3:21 (the phrase does nor occur in the Peshitta text of that passage): al-

though the Hebrew, Greek and Syriac texts there speak of 'garments of skin' being provided for Adam and Eve, the Jewish Aramaic translation, known as the Targum, interprets them as 'garments of honour/glory'; similarly, a famous Rabbi, Rabbi Meir, is said to have had a Hebrew text which read 'garments of light "('or)", instead of 'garments of skin "('or)" '. According to this interpretation these garments of glory or light belonged to Adam and Eve "before" the Fall, whereas, according to the normal translation, 'garments of skin', they were given to them "after" the Fall (the Hebrew text could be interpreted either way, as far as the point in time is concerned). Although the Syriac translators of the Peshitta did not introduce this idea at Genesis 3:21, they do allude to it in some other passages; thus at Psalm 8:6 the Peshitta has 'you (God) created man a little less than the angels; in honour and glory did you "clothe" him' (the Hebrew and the Greek both have 'crown him', not 'clothe him')· Likewise at Psalm 132:16 the Peshitta (but not the Hebrew and Greek) speaks of 'glory' as the clothing of the just. In the Peshitta New Testament the translators have introduced the idea of the Incarnation as 'putting on the body' at two places in the Letter to the Hebrews: at Hebrews 5:7 Christ is described as 'being clothed in flesh' (the Greek has 'in the days of his flesh'); and at Hebrews 10:5 (where Psalm 40 is quoted as a prophecy of Christ) the Syriac has 'You clothed me in a body', whereas the Greek has 'You prepared a body for me'.

— we have already seen the importance of the term "aggen" (based especially on Luke 1:35 and John 1:14) in the Syriac liturgical tradition. In some later Syriac writers (notably St. Isaac of Nineveh) the term also became an important one for describing the transforming action of the Holy Spirit on the interior 'altar of the heart'.

All these terms are based on some distinctive feature to be found only in the Syriac Bible. There are, of course, many other biblical terms which are likewise characteristic of Syriac spirituality, but these are also to be found in the Greek and Hebrew, as well as in the Syriac Bible.

Further information on this subject can be found in the Course on Syriac Spirituality.

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APPENDIX: SOME SAMPLE TRANSLATIONS FROM THE SYRIAC BIBLE

1. The following passage, John 6:1–12, illustrates the relationship between the two Old Syriac manuscripts, S [Sinaiticus] and C [Curetonian], and the Peshitta [P]. For much of the time they are nearly identical, but towards the end, especially, there are places where they differ. The translation is deliberately very literal; (..) denotes words supplied for the sake of English idiom; [..] denotes passages where S is illegible.

John 6:1 SCP After these things our Lord (Jesus CP) went to
the far side of the lake (sea P) of Galilee of Tiberias, 2 and
there went after him a great crowed (many crowds P), for they
were seeing the signs which he was performing upon (on P) the
sick. 3 And our Lord (Jesus CP) went up to the mountain, and
there he was sitting with his disciples.

4 S And there was close at hand the Feast of Unleavened Bread of the Jews.

4 C And there was close at hand Pesakh, the Feast of the Jews.

4 P Now there was close at hand the Feast of Pascha of the Jews;

5 SCP And our Lord (Jesus CP) lifted up his eyes and saw a
great crowd (C many crowds) that had come to him. And
(S omits) he said to Philip, From where shall we buy bread for
these people to eat (C so that these people may eat; P for these
to eat)? 6 Now he as if testing him asked him (P Now this he
said, testing him); for he himself knew what he was going to do.
Philip said to him, Two hundred denarii of bread is not suffici-
ent for them, though they eat very little (P though each one take
very little).

8 One of his disciples said to him, whose name was Andrew (CP Andrew was his name), the brother of Simon Kepha:

9 S On a boy there is here five loaves of barley and two fishes,

9 C There is a boy here who has on him five loaves of barley and two fishes,

9 P There is here a boy who has on him five loaves of barley and two fishes,

S but for all these what will they do?

CP but what will these do for all these?

10 S He said to them, Make the people recline. Now there was much
10 C Jesus said, Go, make the people recline by groups. Now there was much
10 P Jesus said to them, Get all these to recline. Now there was much
S grass in the place. He said to them, Go, make the people recline on the
C grass in that place. And the people reclined, in number five thousand.
P grass in the place. And the men reclined, in number five thousand.
11 S And when they had made them recline, then Jesus took those five
11 C And Jesus took those
11 P And Jesus took the
S (pieces of) bread and the two fishes, and he raised his [eyes] to heaven
C (pieces of) bread,
P bread,
S and blessed and divided for his disciples [ ]
C and blessed and gave to those who were reclining. And likewise also
P and blessed and divided to those who were reclining. And likewise also
S [ ]
C With the fish, as much as they wanted.
P from the fish, as much as they wanted.
12 SCP And when they were satisfied, he said to his disciples, Gather the fragments so that nothing (P lest anything; C + at all) perish.
13 S And they gathered the fragments which were left over from them
13 C And they gathered
13 P And they gathered
S and they filled twelve baskets with what was left over from those five
C and they filled twelve baskets of fragments from the five
P and they filled twelve baskets of fragments which were left over

S loaves of barley and those two fishes. Now the men who were eating of this bread were five thousand.

C (pieces) of barley bread, what was left over by those who ate.

P by those who ate from the five (pieces of) bread.

2. 1 Peter 3:9—21.

The Peshitta is quite often offers an interpretative translation in the Letters of Paul, James and Peter. If one compares the following translation from the Peshitta with one of the standard English translations from the Greek, one will discover a number of small differences.

"1 Peter 3:9" For the reason why you have been called is in
order that you may inherit the blessing. 10 Therefore, who-
ever wishes for life (or: salvation) and desires to see good times,
he should guard his tongue from evil, and let his lips not utter
any deceit. 11 Let him cross over from evil, and do what is
good: let him seek for peace, and run after it. 12 For the eyes
of the Lord are upon the righteous: his ears are (there) to hear
them. But the Lord's face is (also) upon the wicked. 13 Who
will do evil to you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 And
if you should suffer for the sake of justice, blessed are you; and
have no fear for those who try to frighten you, and do not be
upset. 15 Instead, cry 'holy' to the Lord Christ in your hearts,
and be prepared to make a defence to all who require of you
some word concerning the hope of your faith, 16 (doing so) in
humility and in fear, having a good conscience, so that those
who speak against you, as if against wicked people, may be
ashamed as people who abuse your beautiful way of life in Christ.
17 For it is beneficial for you that, while perfoming good works,
you should endure evil, if this is the will of God, rather than
(that this should happen) when you perform evil. 18. For Christ
too once died for our sins: a just person on behalf of sinners, in
order to bring you close to God. He both died in the body and
came to life in spirit. 19 And he preached to the souls which
were held in Sheol, 20 the ones which of old had not been obedi-
ent in the days of Noah, when God's patience gave orders that

there should be the Ark, in the hope of their repentance—but only eight souls entered it and were saved in the water. 21 You too in that same manner (literally, type) are alive (or: saved) in baptism—not washing your body of dirt, but acknowledging God with a pure conscience, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ who was raised up to heaven, where he is at the right hand of God; and the angels, authorities and powers have been subjected to him.

The expansion in verse 20 is of particular interest, for the translator is clearly aware of the Jewish tradition (taken up by Aphrahat and Ephrem) that God provided a long time for the building of the Ark in order that everyone should have a chance to repent.

FOR FURTHER READING

For the Peshitta Old Testament there is a good encyclopaedia article by the Estonian Syriac scholar A. Voobus, in the Supplementary volume to the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1976), 848—54. A more up to date one is to be published before long in the Anchor Dictionary of the Bible. In French there is a more detailed article by C van Puyvelde in the Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplement VI (1960), under the heading 'Orientales, versions'. All these articles also cover the Syriac New Testament as well.

For the various Syriac versions of the New Testament, there is a good chapter in B. M. Metzger, Early Versions of the New Testament (1977).

A more detailed Select Bibliography for the Syriac Bible is available at SEERI.

For translations of some of the Dialogue poems mentioned in Section 6, see S. Brock, Sogiatha: Syriac Dialogue Hymns (The Syrian Churches Series XI, 1987; ed. Jacob Vellian).

For passages illustrating the interpretation of John 19:34 (Section 5) see S Brock, Studies in Syriac Spirituality (Syrian Churches Series 13, 1988; ed Jacob Vellian), chapter 7.

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SYRIAC BIBLE

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QUESTIONS

[The answers should be brief and to the point. They should reach The Director, S. C. C. latest by 31st of March, 1989.]

1 "Virtually all early biblical translations are basically text-oriented, rather than reader-oriented". Explain.

2 What are the consequences of the distinction between scriptural authenticity and literary authenticity, which have affected the translations of the Bible?

3 Write short notes on:

1. Peshitta 2. Diatessaron 3. Early Syriac Commentaries on the Bible 4. Biblical Interpretation in the Syriac Tradition.

4 Briefly describe some of the most important features characteristic of the Syriac tradition in the use of the Syriac Bible for preaching.

5 Show how the phraseology of the Syriac Bible is ingrained in the prayers and hymns of the Syriac Liturgies.

6 Bring out the relation between Syriac Spirituality and Peshitta.

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